


3 Vols



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THE HOUSE OF RIMMON.

THE HOUSE OF RIMMON:

A Black Country Story.

BY

JEANIE GWYNNE BETTANY.

The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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Dedicated

TO MY VERY KIND FRIENDS,

MR. JOHN SAUNDERS,

AND

MR. WALTER BESANT.

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THE HOUSE OF RIMMON.

CHAPTER I.

A HOUSE DIVIDED AGAINST ITSELF.



LL men live by philosophy; but few are conscious of the fact. The philosophy of most men has not been gathered from books or gentle word-teachings, but is largely the result of kicks and buffetings. These the young at first look upon with amazement, as well as horror. Later on, their chief concern is how to avoid ills, and bear those they can't avoid; and this is philosophy.

Every child is an embryo philosopher. Even with the baby it is a question of—does it pay or does it not pay? Before he is possessed of teeth he has probably learnt whether his tears or his patience is the likelier to move the heart of his nurse; and his conduct is regulated accordingly.

The first artifice philosophy teaches a child is, probably, to lie. If parents make it worth while for a child to speak the truth, then his philosophy tells him to avoid lying. If this theory holds good, how much parents have to answer for in the miserable, degenerate lives we see around us!

Jubal Rimmon had early learnt the philosophy of lying to his father, as the only means of getting any peace. That stern parent had never looked on his son with pleasure, from the hour in which he first lay, a befrilled and rosy creature, in his tiny bassinette, up to the time of his being fourteen years of age, at which period our story commences.

Jubal came into the world with many disadvantages. His father was the son of a “butty” collier, who had wished to see his boy a “gentleman.” In this object he had so far succeeded that Joshua

Rimmon had become manager of a branch bank in his native town of Jumley, in South Staffordshire. It is by no means uncommon for butty colliers to accumulate money, and place their sons even in the professions. In this class, removed but by one generation from the sturdy underground toilers, may be met with all extremes and incongruities of character. Everyday life in the Black Country is full of events which cultivated society may imagine to be unreal or impossible, but which are the necessary results of hereditary influences and natural surroundings. In this atmosphere of half-education and half-elevation, Jubal Rimmon was born and bred, and it is not surprising that he should be a mixture of warring instincts and tendencies.

Jubal's philosophy was first strongly called into action when he comprehended that his father had given him a name at which everybody laughed. He felt himself deeply wronged, but soon, convinced that the thing was inevitable, resolved grimly to submit to it. But when we resolve to submit to an inconvenience or an annoyance, is the strife ended? No. Each new day brings a fresh representation of

the evil, until often the concealed grievance becomes the efficient cause of a moral earthquake.

Jubal, being fourteen years old, was at home from school for the Christmas holidays. He had hidden himself, as was his habit, behind one of the heavy window curtains, and was looking out into the dismal street, lit at long intervals by a sickly lamp. It was already dark, but in this household the gas was never lit till tea-time, and tea would not be ready for an hour or more. So Jubal's occupations were limited to gazing into the darkness, and to the consideration of his grievances. His thoughts first dwelt on the fact that at school he alone out of a hundred boys had no nickname, because his own was bad enough. He had written his fortnightly letter home signed "J. Rimmon," until his father had threateningly demanded that the name should be written in full. Since then, Jubal had contented himself with cramping his signature as much as possible.

The number and enormity of the lies conveyed in these fortnightly letters passed through Jubal's mind. These were chiefly sent in answer to inquiries

about his prayers and daily readings of the Bible, questions he knew by experience were not to be evaded.

“I wish there was no Bible,” Jubal thought; “it does make people so disagreeable.” In this Jubal only committed a common error; he took a particular person to represent a class. The person he had in his mind at that moment drove past the window, and at sight of him Jubal left his temporary haven for the seclusion of the dark and musty drawing-room. As he closed the door, he heard his father’s gig pass round the house and into the stable yard, and himself called in a loud tone of voice. Not daring to disobey, he walked into the yard and presented himself without remark before his father, sullen and lowering.

“Rub the horse down,” said that personage in a severe tone to his son, “and give him a drink of meal and water.”

“The groom has nothing to do, father,” said the boy doggedly.

“Do as I tell you,” was the reply, and the beneficent parent strode into the house, muttering

something about breaking that boy's spirit. He softened somewhat as, in passing the kitchen, an agreeable odour of pikelets met his nose. Having divested himself of his top-coat and muffler, he walked into the dining-room, where the gas was now lighted and the maid laying the tea.

His wife was holding his slippers to the fire; but it was not Mr. Rimmon's way to acknowledge any attention bestowed on him, least of all by his wife. Was it not her duty to perform such offices? And why should people be praised for doing their duty?

He seated himself close to the fire, pulled off his boots, and took the warm slippers without comment. His first remark to his wife was, "Send Sarah down to the butcher to say the joint for to-morrow needn't come till the next day, for I shan't be at home for dinner to-morrow."

Sarah, who was placing the plates round the table, unadvisedly ventured to suggest that there was nothing in the house for dinner to-morrow, and that they weren't all going out. Black Country servants are habitually rather free in their remarks

to their employers, belonging as they do for the most part practically to the same class.

Mr. Rimmon took no notice of her remark, and Sarah left the room. In the hall she encountered Jubal, who asked her what sort of a temper his father was in.

“Beastly,” replied the girl.

“Then I don’t think I’ll have any tea.”

“That would spite no one but yourself,” said Sarah; and Jubal, accepting this view of the case, entered the dining-room, opening the door just wide enough to admit of his body passing through, and shuffling round the table with that awkward gait common to boys of his age in the presence of those they fear.

Joshua Rimmon watched his son’s manner of circumambulating the table, with a hard expression in his eyes, and remarked to his wife—

“It’s a singular fact, Ann, that Mr. and Mrs. Harwyn don’t put any style into their pupils. They may teach mathematics, but they don’t make their pupils gentlemen.” In saying this Mr. Rimmon drew himself up, and straightened his large black

silk choker. There was something eminently comical in this remark from a man who never even came in contact with gentlemen.

Mrs. Rimmon made no reply, partly because she didn't know what to say, and partly because she knew that her husband never intended any remark of his to be answered by her ; so she silently poured out some tea for Jubal, and passed him his cup. She would gladly have passed him some pikelet too, but that Mr. Rimmon strictly prohibited any such indulgence. In front of Jubal stood the well-known plate of thick bread, with a little butter on it, to which he began to apply himself with dismal energy. The meal of herbs may be preferable to a feast, when had in peace ; but this can scarcely be said of the meal of herbs when the eater sits on thorns.

One of the discomforts of Jubal's meal-times at home consisted in his father's persevering asking of Bible questions. On this occasion Jubal had just taken his first mouthful of bread and butter, when the process of mastication was stopped by his father's suddenly requiring him to "tell the origin of the rainbow."

Jubal immediately began a scientific definition of the rainbow, as learnt at school. This kind of reply exasperated his father, who, understanding nothing of science, was conscious that he lost much of his dignity in discussing it. He therefore informed his son that he wished for a description of the Flood.

“Well,” said Jubal, “I imagine it was something like that described in the ‘*Mill on the Floss*,’ a local flood, where a man called Noah saved all the animals on his own farm by means ——”

Jubal was allowed to proceed no further. “How dare you tamper with the Bible, Jubal?” broke out his father angrily; “And pray what is the *Mill on the Floss*?”

“A book by George Eliot,” replied Jubal.

“Then George Eliot must be a very bad man, to make game of the Flood. Far better never open the Bible than write about it in that profane spirit.”

“But, father,” interrupted Jubal, a smile dawning on his face, “George Eliot’s flood isn’t the Bible flood, and George Eliot’s a woman.”

“For the future, sir,” said Mr Rimmon, with all

the dignity he could command, "you'll read none of the works of that woman, who writes trash, and who has the indecency to call herself by a man's name."

Mr. Rimmon was very much out of temper. His son had twice caught him tripping. He took out his watch, and, noting the time, said he must go to his Bible class, and left the room; upon which Jubal breathed freely.

As soon as his father's footsteps had died away, he looked at his mother, and said, "I thought I was in for a horsewhipping, but perhaps it's only keeping;" and he gave a great sigh.

Mrs. Rimmon silently moved towards him, and placed a trembling hand on his shoulder. Jubal's lips quivered, and the tears welled up into his eyes. "Oh, mother," he said bitterly, "I do wish the holidays were over."

"I know it's not happy for you, Jubal," replied his mother tremulously. "If I could do anything to make it better, I'm sure I would."

"It's not your fault, mother," said the boy, who was not to be enticed out of his dark mood. "Father's hard with you as well as me. He isn't so

hard on Keziah. I'm sure he takes a pleasure in tormenting me. Besides, father's ignorant. He may understand his bank, and his building, but he doesn't know anything else. Fancy his saying I wasn't taught to be a gentleman at school. If father looked as much a gentleman as Mr. Harwyn"—here he broke into a laugh. Mrs. Rimmon cast frightened glances towards the door. Jubal, understanding her meaning, continued in a lower tone, "How can I learn to be a gentleman when I'm kept so short of clothes that I'm a laughing-stock at school, and when he treats me like dirt under his feet before the servants, till they don't respect me at all? He doesn't let Kizzy go shabby, nor put her down before the servants; and they all like her," said the boy ruefully; "and that is why."

"No, I don't think that is the reason," said the mother gently; and her face brightened at the thought of her daughter. "It is because Kizzy has such a way with her."

"She talks to father straight enough! sometimes."

"Yes, she does; and I often wish she wouldn't

aggravate him so. But then look at her sweet way with him after. She cries her eyes out if she's been ill-natured to him or anybody else."

"I do believe Kizzy loves father," said Jubal meditatively. "How she can is a bit beyond me."

"There's no one like Kizzy," said the mother. "I believe she loves everybody. I don't believe your father'll ever be right till he's got her back in the house."

"What did he let her take a situation for?"

"She always gets her own way," replied the mother. "That's why, I suppose. After all, I'm not sure but what it's better for her: she's with uncommon nice people; and Kizzy's too good for Jumley."

"She's the prettiest girl in all Staffordshire," said Jubal.

"Yes," said the mother. "I never saw anyone so pretty, and that's what partly takes with people."

"Kizzy and everybody are happier than me," remarked Jubal, reverting to his own case. "Harry Saltring, my chum at school, is having no end of a

fine time at home now; and I dare say Kizzy is having a jolly time at Leamington."

A postman's knock interrupted their conversation. Two letters were brought in by Sarah, who remarked that they were both for Jubal.

He looked at the envelopes, and exclaimed, "One from Kizzy and one from little Saltring." He opened his schoolfellow's first. It ran as follows:—

LANGTON, Dec. —.

MY DEAR JACK,—You see I haven't forgotten my promise to call you Jack, instead of that outlandish name of yours. Papa says he will write to-day to your dad, to ask you to spend the rest of your holidays with us. As your sister is away, ma says it must be dull for you. You must be sure to come. Never mind about togs. You can wear some of my big brother's. We are going to have a party on Thursday, we juveniles; and we are going to jump for oranges. Papa has bought a boxful. Laura and I opened one end to see how many there looked in it, and we've eaten some, and they are big ones. Mamma has had the attic cleared, and we are to do what we like in it. Edmond says he shall have his lathe up there, which is a shame, for it makes such a noise, we shan't be able to hear ourselves speak. I propose we play at coalpits. Laura and I are carrying up lots of coal. Mamma gave us the key of the room, and promised not to go in. Bring your skates with you, for the ice will bear; and mind you come on Wednesday.

Your loving friend,

HARRY.

Jubal read this letter to his mother, and watched her face as she heard it.

"I wish you hadn't vexed your father so, over tea," said the mother.

Jubal disconsolately gazed at his clothes, and observed, "Harry Saltring dresses no end well."

"Jubal," began his mother, "try your best to please your father to-night, and I'll ask him to-morrow." And she looked as if she had promised to beard a lion in his den. "But open Kizzy's letter and see what she says."

He abstractedly obeyed. As he unfolded the letter, something dropped out. He mechanically picked it up, and glanced at it. "Mother," he exclaimed, rising to his feet, "what do you think? A post-office order for a whole sovereign!"

Mrs. Rimmon could not read, but she must needs look at the piece of paper that was worth so much as a whole sovereign to her boy.

"I do mean to say Kizzy's a brick," cried Jubal. "She says it's a Christmas box, and I'm to spend it all in the things I like best, and not tell anybody."

“It would buy you some new clothes, Jubal,” said the mother. The boy’s face clouded again.

“It’s the first pocket-money I’ve ever had,” he said, “and it isn’t going in clothes. No,” he added proudly; “they won’t laugh at my clothes when I carry a sovereign in my pocket. Why, Harry Salt-ring only has a sovereign when he comes back. I shan’t change it till everybody has seen it.”

Jubal was in such spirits that it was comparatively easy for him to assume a conciliatory manner with his father when he came home.





CHAPTER II.

A CONTRAST.



R. RIMMON'S first words on being asked to permit his son to go to the Saltrings', were these : "I shall not allow him to go. The family is utterly without religion. I've heard they go to theatres, and have dancing in their house. They are Church-goers too, and would win Jubal away from Methodism. They never have family prayers, and I question if they ask a blessing before their meals."

Mrs. Rimmon stood in distressed submission, and made no reply. A moment passed, when her husband suddenly changed his tone and said—

"All I have been telling you is quite true, Ann ;

but I think I shall let Jubal go, if he promise me to pray against temptation. It may do him good to see the contrast between sinners and ourselves."

Mr. Rimmon meant *himself*.

His wife was not satisfied with this explanation, and the permission thus given puzzled her extremely. It need not have done so, had she possessed more penetration. The change was due to a rapid calculation on Mr. Rimmon's part, which resulted in his believing that to keep Jubal at home during the holidays would certainly cost more than his railway fare to Langton and back. He resolved, however, that no new clothes should be purchased for the visit. He often boasted that the pair of trousers he had on, had been in wear for seven years; why should his son have new clothes oftener than once in two years, even if he did grow?

No question of clothes, however, could trouble Jubal, when he heard that his father had given permission for him to go to the Saltrings'. But his mother's mind was not a little vexed that her son should go on a visit with such a poor outfit; and she lay awake all night considering the question.

The outcome of her vigil was that on the following day a new suit for Jubal arrived. Mr. Rimmon was secretly elated, for he knew the clothes could not possibly have been bought out of the housekeeping money, that proving often insufficient to supply their scanty necessities. Mr. Rimmon consistently acted on a theory that it was best to give less than was required, for if more were given, it would certainly be spent. He thought Keziah must have sent the clothes, but he did not deign to ask.

Jubal never knew that his mother sold the only bit of jewellery she possessed, to obtain this suit for him.

When the morning came for Jubal to go to Langton, Mrs. Rimmon was almost cheerful, so proud was she to see her son looking handsome and well-dressed. Jubal really was a fine-looking fellow, with his bright hazel eyes, his curly brown hair, and clear ruddy complexion.

A moment before he left the house, with his small bag in his hand, he went into the kitchen to say good-bye to Sarah. The poor soul had tears in her eyes, and with a great air of secrecy, drew Jubal

behind the kitchen door, and forced something into his hand. He put it into his pocket, and did not examine it till he was in the train. It was a paper packet enclosing half-a-crown, a gift richer than any Joshua Rimmon could give.

A cunning light came into Jubal's eyes as he made this discovery, and thought, "What a good thing I didn't show my sovereign to Sarah! She would never have given me this half-crown."

Langton station was but a small shed, but had an air of superiority for all that. In summer it was gay with flowers, and even at this season it was gay with evergreens. When Jubal stood upon the platform, he noted with heightened colour the number of carriages in waiting, and wondered if he should ride to Mr. Saltring's in one of them. He was not disappointed, for his friend Harry took him at once to a waggonette, where two ladies were seated. Jubal blushed very much as he was introduced to them. They were Mrs. Saltring and Miss Laura Saltring, the latter a girl of thirteen. Jubal did not look once at her; and when they arrived at the house, his only idea of her was a vague impression

of dark red, and of black fur, and light curls falling under a beaver hat.

The house stood close upon the main road through Langton, with palisading in front of it, in which respect it resembled Mr. Rimmon's house. But here the resemblance ended, for Mr. Saltring's windows were gracefully draped, and pretty bird-cages hung in them, and, winter though it was, they were filled with choice plants.

Jubal noticed a group of rosy faces pressed against an upstairs window, and heard sounds of merriment. Who had ever heard sounds of merriment proceeding from Mr. Rimmon's house?

The front door opened before the carriage had well stopped, and, when the party entered, Jubal stood shyly on the mat until Harry Saltring pushed him into the dining-room, where an early dinner was laid. Jubal was about to seat himself on the chair nearest the door, when Laura took him lightly by the hand, and led him towards the fire, saying saucily, "What did you want to sit down there for?" and she looked laughingly into his face. He coloured more than ever as his eyes met hers. He

could not have explained why, but he mentally contrasted her with his sister, and to Laura's disadvantage. The face looking into his was very lovely, but there was something lacking in it which made his sister's face charming beyond all others.

"You mustn't be shy," said Laura, seeing that he made no reply. "We had a boy here last holidays who was shy, till the last week. Then he wished he hadn't been, for he had lost no end of fun by it."

Jubal tried to think of something to say, but nothing came.

"Your name's Jack, isn't it?" went on Laura, taking her hat off, and shaking the feather in front of the fire.

"No, it isn't," responded Jubal, looking down on the carpet: "only you must call me Jack, for my own name is a very ugly one, and please don't ask what it is."

Mr. Saltring, who had come into the room unobserved, and overheard the remark, called out in a loud tone of voice habitual to him, "What's in a name?" and then smacked Jubal familiarly on the back, and told him to make himself at home.

Jubal muttered an almost inaudible "Thank you," and gathered courage to look round the room ; and his eyes dwelt upon one luxury after another. At last he rested on a picture of a young man with his arm about a girl's neck, and gazed at it for a long time.

Laura in the meantime induced her father in a whisper to promise her something which her mother had refused her that morning ; and she went upstairs with a kind of triumphal march. Mr. Saltring began to decant a bottle of wine.

"Do you drink wine, my boy?" said he, heartily, to his young guest.

Jubal started, removed his eyes from the picture to Mr. Saltring, and stammered out, "No, sir."

"All the better for that," was the reply. "Keep to it, though I ought not to say it, for I am a wine-merchant ; and if everybody took that advice, where would be our dinners, and Laura's new feathers?" This latter item was probably suggested to his mind by Laura's whispered request. "Have you ever seen a prettier girl than our Laura?" went on Mr. Saltring, looking teasingly at the shy boy.

Jubal said something about not having looked much at Laura yet : at which Mr. Saltring burst into a roar of laughter, and, taking out his big yellow silk handkerchief, wiped his eyes, after which operation he laughed once more. When he had got his breath, he shook Jubal by the shoulders, and called him a sly dog, and warned him that he would look at her more than once before he left, he'd lay a wager. Jubal laughed too, he hardly knew why : but there was such a thawing influence in that house.

It delighted Mr. Saltring to see Jubal laugh ; and he proposed to show him over the premises before dinner, to make him feel at home. He first took him into the kitchen.

“Now, I'll put you up to a trick or two. I'm just going to try the potatoes to see if they're done.”

Jubal could scarcely believe his ears. He could not have imagined his father “trying” potatoes.

One of the smiling maidservants produced a plate and a silver fork, and then removed the cover of one of the saucepans. Mr. Saltring took out a smoking hot potato, and proceeded to smother it in butter, and eat it, all the time beaming with good

humour. "This is the way I try potatoes," he said, when he had finished; "and you can, when you choose. You won't find our servants snap your head off for encroaching on their preserves. I hire them with special regard to this. But now I'll show you where the pantry is. The pantry is a schoolboy's paradise."

Once inside this sanctum, Mr. Saltring closed the door; he then began to indicate the objects on the shelves. "These are pies made of bottled fruit. If you want to know what's inside at any time, I'll show you the way; but I daresay you've learnt at school. Boys are dreadful rogues." And he took a knife, and dexterously placing it between the pie-crust and the dish, raised the former and looked underneath. "Plum," he said. "Should you like some? but no, it will spoil your dinner. They generally keep the custards behind those tall jars. That's tipsy cake up there. Don't have any of that, nor that other thing they call trifle. No trifle of sherry and brandy in them, I assure you." So he went through everything, recommending some dishes and dissuading from others.

While they were thus engaged, Harry's voice was heard calling lustily, and the door was forced open. The boy thumped his father's broad back vigorously for stealing his friend the moment he entered the house. Mr. Saltring left the boys to their own devices, and they went at once to the rabbit-hutch, quite a considerable erection, divided into compartments.

"We've done a roaring trade with the rabbits," said Harry, stroking the nose of a handsome buck, who was protruding that feature through the bars. "None of the young ones have died, except one lot, that that old white one ate up; and we've sold them all for fourpence each at the month. Father brings all the Thorley's food for them, and the bran we get for nothing."

"I wish my father would let me keep rabbits," said Jubal.

"I'll give you one if you like to take it home with you," rejoined Harry, "and a packet or two of Thorley." And they went on to admire a raven and an owl, both highly-prized possessions. "We shall have fine larks catching mice for the owl," Harry

told Jubal. “Old Rogers—he’s the groom, you know—taught me how to get hold of them with my hands. But there’s the dinner bell, and I’m so hungry.”





CHAPTER III.

DR. TOWERS.

IN almost every heart or consciousness there is, figuratively speaking, the warm fire, and the bright light, and the well-spread table prepared for an imaginary guest. Some, who are most fortunate, find that guest comes at last, and receives all the wealth that has been hoarded up for him during the years when he came not. Others, less fortunate, have always the empty chair beside them, the more empty that it has never been filled. And at last they cease to watch at the window for one who will never come.

This class of persons is generally described as eccentric; and their only consolation is that that imaginary somebody, had he not lost his way towards them in the maze of the world, would have under-

stood and appreciated them. So communing with themselves, the habit of reserve grows upon them with years, and imparts to them a grimness of aspect. Had the warming influence of some beloved being, who should understand and make allowances, come into the life, how different it would have been. How the whole nature would have grown and blossomed. For such what is there but God and a coming Eternity, where the long-expected and much longed-for may yet meet them, and all the vast enigma of life be unravelled?

Some such theory as this is needed to explain why in a small house in Langton a medical man and his two sisters lived almost entirely in seclusion. Dr. Towers and his sister Amy were old settlers in the neighbourhood. It was not until they had been there ten years that they were joined by another sister, a married lady, of whose existence the inhabitants had never heard; and nobody had ever summoned up courage to ask one of them a question. This was the more remarkable, considering that Dr. Towers had a large practice, and conversed very pleasantly with his patients on general topics.

His sister Amy, too, was most kindly and sweet in her manners, returning her neighbours' calls with praiseworthy regularity; yet she never on any occasion mentioned where they had lived before they came to Langton, or the name and position of any relative they might have. The Saltrings were very friendly with them, and Mr. Saltring often remarked in reference to Miss Towers that it puzzled him greatly that she should be so long and so completely silent. The Langtonians further marvelled that Dr. Towers, with such a large and well-paying practice, should live in such a cottage of a place. He did not appear like a miser; yet what could he do with his money? He kept a horse, it is true, but it was only used for the saddle. When asked by Mr. Saltring why he did not keep a carriage and drive Miss Towers about, he smiled a proud self-contained smile, and said it did not suit his convenience. Mr. Saltring had once dropped in upon him when he was dining, in such a tiny room that his large body seemed to fill it. He was dining off cold bacon. Without any apology he asked Mr. Saltring to join him, which he did, though he was anything but

partial to the dish. But, as he told his wife afterwards, he would have eaten cinders had Dr. Towers asked him.

After this incident of the dinner, Mr. Saltring and his wife puzzled their brains as to whether Dr. Towers could really be in want of money, and if so, how they could induce such a proud man to accept some. But no plan suggested itself, except that they should all sham being ill, which ruse, though pretty in theory, was scarcely practicable with so clever a doctor. Mr. Saltring did venture to urge upon Dr. Towers that he should take out those little windows and put in some more civilised-looking ones, and that he might have his garden done up a little. Towers good-naturedly replied, "When you come to live at my cottage, you can have the windows put in and the garden done."

The weather was extremely cold, freezing, as Harry had said in his letter to Jubal; and Dr. Towers and his sisters, Amy and Louisa, the latter supposed to be the widow of a French husband, Pelbois by name, were sitting in the tiny room already alluded to over an early breakfast. It was

not yet daylight, and a single candle burned upon the breakfast table. A good fire blazed in the small grate, and the table was very near to it owing to the small size of the room. Towers stretched his feet towards the blaze. His lips were firmly pressed together; his dark heavy eyebrows were slightly raised; and his keen grey eyes had that fixed look in them which comes of much thinking to no purpose.

At last he opened his lips and remarked, "As far as I can see, Amy, there is no help for it. I must have him here as my assistant. I don't believe he'll ever get qualified."

"Impossible, Robert," said Madame Pelbois. "Questions would be asked. He would not be received."

"It is easier to ask questions than to get them answered," replied Towers, with an unbending look in his face. "And as for his not being received, I'll guarantee that any man I bring shall be received."

"But," broke in Amy faintly, "he ought to try and qualify; for if you were dead, he could not take your practice, and what could stand between him and starvation then?"

Towers laughed—a short, hard laugh. “Am I likely to die?” he said. “Haven’t I endured enough to kill twenty men; and here I am, with no visible signs of decay upon me yet. At any rate,” he added, as if pushing away some distant difficulty, for the purpose of tackling one close at hand, “Tom is thirty years of age, and is no further on than he was ten years ago; and how am I to keep on paying his expenses, with the heavy drain I have always upon my ready money?”

“That’s reasonable enough,” said Madame Pelbois, drinking the last drop of her weak coffee. “Still, it will seem to take away our privacy altogether, the only luxury now left us. I did think, after all our turmoil, that this little haven would be left to us while we lived.”

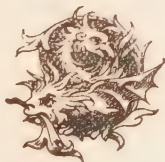
“Women are slow to learn,” rejoined Towers. “I have long since learned that to wish or to hope is to be denied. Once resolve that nothing shall make you take a certain course; the next day you are driven into it. You two frail women may have the Atlantic rolling between you and my arm of protection yet.”

Louisa held up her thin hands imploringly, and cried, "For Heaven's sake, Robert, don't talk about that."

"Louisa," said the doctor, "lock those words within your heart. Do not even think them, or the cruel Providence that has followed us all our lives will hear you, and you will go to Nebraska, and alone."

Madame Pelbois' face was ashen pale, but she made no reply.

The following week all Langton was alive with the news that Dr. Towers had a new assistant, a tall dark Spanish-looking man, said to be the doctor's nephew; but he was as reticent as the rest of his family.





CHAPTER IV.

THE VICAR'S PARTY.

THE Vicar of Langton was about to give a Christmas party to his parishioners, the nature of which may be gathered from the following colloquy, which took place one morning at the Saltrings' breakfast-table. Breakfast was nearly over, when Mr. Saltring said, "Mr. Rockingham wants all of us to go there to-morrow, Mary."

Mrs. Saltring's pleasant face clouded, and she said, "What a nuisance! I detest his parties. Besides, one is always sure to meet the 'butcher and baker and candlestick-maker.' Mr. Rockingham has no discrimination. He never takes the trouble even to consider whether the people he invites are accustomed to meet each other."

"I suppose," said Mr. Saltring, "he invites all the parish together, to have one bother of it. He does it to please the people, not to please himself; and if he fails, that's his misfortune, not his fault."

But Mrs. Saltring had more to say. "It's too bad. Somebody ought to speak to him about it. Last time we went there, Mrs. Simons the green-grocer was there, and she laughed in my face as we passed her in the hall, as much as to say, 'The parson makes no difference between us, though you do think yourself so much above me.' I thought I should have walked right out of the place. Mr. Rockingham holds there are only two classes of society, I think; the aristocracy, to which he belongs, and the 'lower orders,' as he calls them."

"Well, Mary," Mr. Saltring replied, "if Mr. Rockingham is blind, he may not be to blame; and certainly he tries to be agreeable all round. Besides, what does it matter if we do meet the butcher and the baker and the candlestick-maker? We have had some for our ancestors very likely, for we don't know much about them."

"That may be true," his wife rejoined; "but

surely we may try and get a better position for our children. We are not furthering that project when we lower ourselves."

Mr. Saltring rose, as if to put an end to the conversation; and, going round to his wife's end of the table, pinched her pretty ear in a friendly way, at the same time remarking, "We had better go to the party, Mary. We mustn't bring up the small fry to despise people."

His wife looked into her cup, quietly thinking. She was a pretty little blonde woman, who had had a better offer than Mr. Saltring's. She never referred to it, but yet always felt herself on a pedestal ever since. It is a pity all the women who have had good offers cannot be labelled to that effect; then we should cease to puzzle our brains for a reason for the consequential looks they choose to adopt, especially in the presence of other women.

On the following evening, troops of oddly dressed people were making their way towards Langton vicarage, which stood opposite the church, at the end of the straggling village. Children fairly

swarmed in at the vicarage gates, trampled upon the flower-beds, and trod down the turf, to the great annoyance of the gardener, who was shrieking himself hoarse in his master's service.

At the top of the church steps, a shaggy little old man was perched, like some sage raven, chuckling to himself, and throwing derisive language after the people. This was the sexton and bellringer, who was generally known by a nickname, which, though he had borne it full twenty years, had lost none of its sting. This name was "Jody Waddy," believed to be a corruption of his true name, Joseph Wadeham.

"Hollo, Jody," cried one facetious youth, spying him out on his perch, "aren't you going to the party, eh?"

"I ain't going to the —— party," replied Jody, waxing wroth. "I'd liefer go to th' kitching an' get a pint o' 'ot ale. You fools 'll get nothin' but weak tea."

Another youth, hearing this, called out, "You go to tea, Jody! Not you. You're going to have some radishes to tea, off your wife's grave, aren't you, Jody?"

“By the Lord, if you dunner shut that trap o’ yourn,” replied the sexton, infuriated, “I’ll bury you a foot deep i’ water, when you die, I will, and pray God that be soon.”

Mr. Saltring with his party, arriving at this moment, heard this outburst, and spoke to the old man in what he meant to be a kindly way. “Don’t swear on the church steps, Jody,” he said.

“I conner help it,” replied Jody. “Them little debbles are enough to mak’ th’ parson swear i’ th’ middle o’ his sermon.”

“Well, it was a shame to accuse you of growing things on your wife’s grave.”

“’Tworn’t that as riled me,” rejoined Jody. “But them young debbles know as nothin’ wull grow on old Betty. She worn’t no good when she wor alive, an’ she ain’t no good now she’s dead. Why, ’er’s been dead goin’ for seventeen year, an’ every year I’ve tried summat different, an’ nothin’ ’ll grow on old Betty, no not so much as a bit o’ rue to mak’ me a sup o’ rue tea.”

“But surely,” broke in Mrs. Saltring, aghast, “you don’t grow things to eat on your wife’s grave.”

"No, I don't," replied Jody. "Havener I just told yer, nothin' wull grow on 'er? And," he added ruefully, "it's the only bit o' garding I've got, too. It's my opinion"—here he lowered his voice to a very sagacious tone—"that 'er just does it to spite me."

Jubal, who was standing close behind Mrs. Saltring, was much astonished at this conversation. He was more surprised when he saw Mr. Saltring give the old man a shilling, telling him to buy some tobacco, and to leave off swearing.

"You're a real gentleman," said the sexton, trying the coin with his teeth, "an' I'll bury you in the driest grave in the yard when you die."

Jubal was not at all sorry when they left the sexton and went into the vicarage. The door stood open, and the guests were entering, each with a sort of "company" expression. The vicar himself, tall, erect, and grizzled, was in the hall to receive them, and to remind them to rub their shoes.

"He looks more like a soldier than a parson," remarked Jubal in a whisper to Harry.

"He was in the army once," was the reply; "and his brother, Sir Mortimer, is in the army now."

A cross-looking servant here pushed Jubal, and told him to go into the "drawing-room," and not be stopping up the "hentry."

"Where is it?" said Jubal to Laura, who was on the other side of him. "That servant seems to think I know the way."

"We ought to have kept close to mamma," replied Miss Laura. "She must be in the library taking off her things; that's where we always go." And she took hold of Jubal's sleeve, and led him along with her. "Wait here," she said, as they got to the library door, "with Harry." She soon came out again, with her mother, amid a crowd of others.

"What are we to do?" asked Jubal of Laura, on the way to the drawing-room.

"Oh," replied Laura, with a saucy toss of her head, "you must pretend to be pleased with everything, and smile when Mr. Rockingham looks at you, and pretend to think it rare fun to walk about the room in queer dresses Mr. Rockingham will give out, and make grimaces at your next neighbour, which Mr. Rockingham calls 'charades'."

By this time they had squeezed inside the draw-

ing-room, which was so crowded that Jubal said it was as bad as being in the Jumley market-hall. "We shall all have to go and drink tea in the dining-room presently," said Laura; "and the housekeeper, who presides, will try to look insultingly at everybody."

"How long are we to stand here?" asked Jubal.

"Until there's a general move in another direction," said Mr. Saltring, laughing. "The gong will go for tea, and then all the people will back on to us, being nearest the door; so look out."

When the gong sounded, the Saltrings passed out of the room as quickly as possible, and stood aside to let the crowd go by. The dining-room was soon filled, and some farmers' sons were left in the doorway, standing first on one leg and then on the other, winking at one another, and wondering where they should be packed. The Saltrings, perceiving this, did not move forward, but remained in the hall.

When some of the earliest guests had finished their tea, they came out of the dining-room in a very heated condition; and the Saltrings took the

places they had vacated. They found the vicar in the middle of a story.

“The Red Sea is dreadfully hot. You can imagine nothing so hot, unless it be your own bake-ovens. The second night we were on it, my cousin, Lord Harran, said to me, ‘We might as well be in a bake-oven, Rockingham.’”

“What a grand thing to say!” was the comment of a ploughboy.

The vicar put up his eye-glass, and casting a hasty glance round, said, “As I see we have all finished tea, we will sing grace, and then go to other amusements.”

The Saltrings had not commenced tea, and their discomfiture set the housekeeper in a good humour for the remainder of the evening.

The vicar again spoke. “Those among you who have not seen my swimming bath might like to look at it;” and he led the way thither. He made a point of always showing his swimming bath to his parishioners, for the purpose, as he told a friend, of teaching them that cleanliness was next to godliness.

“I plunge into the tank every morning before

breakfast, winter and summer alike; and often I have to break the ice. It always reminds me of being in the Polar regions. A cold bath is the finest thing in the world. And now, my friends, for those of you who may not care to act charades, there are several tables of 'squails' in the morning-room."

"Those round tables, Saltring, we use for breakfast," said the vicar, pointing them out. "My cousin, Lord Harran, has some thirty tables like that in his breakfast-room." Here Mr. Rockingham left off, to seize a youth who was trying to fight his way into the squail room. "My good boy," he said, "pray desist: can't you see that the room is already full. Come to the dining-room and act charades."

"It is difficult to imagine that boy acting anything, unless it were Fat Joe in 'Pickwick,'" remarked a young lady of some four-and-twenty years old to a young man about three years her junior, who appeared to be her brother from the strong resemblance between them.

As soon as this young lady spoke, Jubal pulled Harry by the sleeve and pointed her out. "Oh, mother," said Harry, when he had looked at her

“do you know who those are? They are Mr. Harwyn’s brother and sister. She comes to stay at the school sometimes; and that’s her brother Gerald, such a good cricketer. You should see him bowl. He’s at the Birmingham Hospital, learning to be a doctor. I wonder how they came to be here.”

Gerald Harwyn had spied out the boys, and was making towards them of his own accord. “Why, surely this is Rimmon, and little Saltring,” he said, taking each by the hand. “I didn’t know you lived in this neighbourhood.”

“Jack doesn’t live here,” said Harry; “he’s on a visit to us. This is mother, and father, and Laura.”

“I’ve often heard my son speak of you,” said Mr. Saltring; “I’m very glad to make your acquaintance.”

“This is my sister Maud,” said Gerald, introducing her. “We are visiting at Mr. Layton’s, the lawyer, you know.”

They went in company to see the charades. “Do they call this charades?” said Jubal. “They

should see those we act at school." And truly the assemblage of shrieking and laughing figures in quaint masks and strange dresses might have reminded the travelled spectator more of a carnival than anything else.





CHAPTER V.

KEZIAH.



THE dismal house at Jumley had been going on in its own dismal way, while Jubal was enjoying the hitherto untasted pleasures of cheerful home life at Langton. On the day of the vicarage party, Mrs. Rimmon was sitting at one of the dining-room windows, laboriously mending stockings; and as the light faded, she looked out on the agreeable prospect of a high brick wall, thickly set with broken glass; it surrounded Mr. Rimmon's fruit-garden, which could only be entered by a single door fixed in the wall. To this door there were two keys, one of which Mr. Rimmon always carried, the other remaining in

the possession of the gardener, except at night, when the master took charge of both.

The garden wall was a great eyesore, for the rising generation of Jumley copiously practised writing upon it with chalk and tarred sticks. This afternoon saw upon the wall unmistakable allusions to Mr. Rimmon, by the side of a tolerably good portrait of that personage by some budding artist. The portrait was so good that Mrs. Rimmon recognised it, in spite of the unnecessarily elongated nose, and determined to tell the groom to clean it off, as soon as it should be dark enough. But nothing could remove another portrait of her husband that adorned the wall, executed years ago with a tarred stick.

Mr. Rimmon had never in any way alluded to these caricatures; but his wife knew that he had seen the tarred drawing, for he had gone to the window on the first morning of its appearance, to look if the postman were coming, and had turned very red. From that time he had never looked out of the window at all.

Mrs. Rimmon was very sad this evening, and the tears fell drop by drop from her dimmed eyes on to

her worn fingers. Jubal had not written to her since he had gone away, not even a line to tell of his safe arrival. Mr. Saltring had announced this in a note to Mr. Rimmon. "Ah," she thought to herself mournfully, "he will never want to come home again. What is there to attract him? He sees me haggard and careworn, shabbily dressed, and afraid of his father. He will get to care nothing for me."

While Mrs. Rimmon was thus meditating, a tall lithe figure burst in upon her, without any warning, bringing in a stream of cold air.

"Oh, Kizzy, my darling, how you frightened me!" exclaimed Mrs. Rimmon.

The young girl flung her arms about her mother, and kissed her again and again. "Why, you've been crying again, mother!" she said. "Dry your tears, now. Has he been scolding you, the old dragon? Where is he? I've a charming piece of news for him, and I'm only considering whether to indulge him with it before or after prayers to-night."

"Please don't vex your father, Kizzy; oh, please,

don't let us have any row," pleaded the trembling mother.

The girl gave a wild laugh. "You leave me to do my own business, mother. I get on better with father than either you or Jubal, who cave in to him so." And the merry girl struck a match on the sole of her little shoe, and proceeded to light the gas. She then perceived a paper lying on the table, which she took up and examined; and her mother looked admiringly at her, as all the world did. Such an exquisite oval face, such ripe lips, such rich colouring: and then the eyes—they were irresistible, as many a youth in Jumley knew. These brown orbs, so mobile in expression, so seductively tender one moment, so terrible the next, were perhaps Keziah's greatest charm. For the most part, the piquant face had a mocking look upon it, as if life were one gigantic joke; yet it would change in a moment to an expression of angelic tenderness at the sight of others' woes. Her hair, short, black, and glossy, curled in a wayward fashion of its own all over the shapely head, and gave the girl a sort of defiant look. Mrs. Rimmon, though no artist, saw that her

daughter was a beautiful creature ; and though no student of human kind, she felt the force of Keziah's character. All through her childhood, to will had been to accomplish. Mrs. Rimmon looked upon her daughter as a being she could not understand, but could only wonder at.

Kizzy looked up from the paper, her eyes full of merriment now ; and there was a touch of irony in her voice as she said, " Here's another subscription list, headed by 'J. Rimmon, Esq., ten pounds ten.' " She hurriedly dipped a pen in the ink, and wrote opposite to the announcement, in a bold, fearless hand, " robbed from his wife and children," and with a little dancing step, she carried it to the chimney-piece, where she placed it conspicuously.

She next flung her hat on to her father's chair. The rest of her outer garments followed. Her mother was meekly going to remove them.

" No, mother," she said with a mischievous look. " Let lazybones do it himself. Didn't I surprise you, now ? " she ran on. " You didn't know I was coming home, did you ? I said I wouldn't, when I was cross, you know." And the great eyes became

melting, as she added, "But I couldn't help it, you see, after all," and she fell to kissing her mother again.

Mrs. Rimmon, when she was released, took up her heap of stockings and sat down again. Kizzy watched her, seemed to take a sudden resolve, darted forward, possessed herself of the stockings, and flung them on the fire.

"Oh, Kizzy," cried the mother; "what have you done! Oh, how could you do that?"

"Is it the fortieth or the fiftieth time you've refooted them, mother," asked the girl, with the old mocking look in her face. "It's the last at all events." But perceiving that her mother was beginning to cry, she suddenly knelt at her feet, took hold of both of her hands, and gazed at her caressingly.

"Don't cry, mother; I've brought home some new stockings. I didn't mean to bring any for father; but I couldn't help it at the last." Then she darted up; she was always swift in her movements. "I've brought something for tea," she said, opening her black bag. "Guess what it is. It's a

delicious haddock ; and I'm not going to give father any. I can't help plaguing him a little," she said deprecatingly, for her mother was beginning to object. " Oh, there's a good time coming—I mean to-night, before or after prayers, not during prayers ; it's always a bad enough time then."

" Oh, dear Kizzy, if you are to quarrel with your father, please don't bring in Scripture, now don't."

Keziah rang the bell. " Now, Sarah, you dear old thing, cook the haddock, will you ? " she said, when Sarah appeared.

" Won't you wait till your father comes ? " asked the anxious mother.

" No ; why should he always be considered before everybody else ? I've just come from Leamington, and I want my tea." And she sat down to the piano and played a few gay snatches. Her exuberance of spirits was always so great, it was bound to have an outlet of some kind ; and when there was no other way, Kizzy was a sad torment.

" Mother," she said, breaking off her music, " what did you call me Keziah for ? Somebody says I ought to have been called Irene." Then she

suddenly burst into song, taking up the refrain in the middle—

For the touch of a hand and a whispered word
Have rendered me blest for aye ;

and the wild, clear young voice rang out so joyously that the dismal house seemed to have been changed as if by magic. Could the wilful girl have meant to tell her mother any story in this song ? If so, it was lost upon Mrs. Rimmon : she was noting that the tea was brought in. She told Keziah that tea was ready, and the light-hearted girl continued singing after she left the piano—

Love is the lord of the May.

And, as she sat down, nothing could have looked more in harmony with the words than her own self.

“I am so glad that Jubal is gone to Langton,” she observed, as her mother poured out her tea. “It is so dull for him here. He’s not like me. I can be contented anywhere. Oh,” she broke off, “*he’s* coming ; I can hear him.”

“Oh, Kizzy, don’t vex him—please, don’t.”

The dining-room door opened, and Joshua entered.

"Well, Kizzy," he began, in an apologetic and conciliatory tone, going round to his daughter, and not feeling quite sure of his reception.

She presented her round blooming cheek to be kissed, as if doing a sort of penance ; and Mr. Rimmon moved round to his end of the table as awkwardly as Jubal had done on an occasion already described.

"I'm glad there's haddock for tea, Kizzy," remarked the father, in an insinuating tone ; "I like haddock."

"This haddock is mine," replied she, nodding her head with saucy defiance.

"Oh, indeed," said Mr. Rimmon, hardening visibly ; "and whose money bought it, I wonder?"

"Not yours," retorted Keziah, quite decided by her father's look to continue tormenting him.

"There's more than you can eat," continued Mr. Rimmon meditatively.

"Then I will save it for mother's breakfast."

"You are very selfish."

"You are not," said Keziah, with her mocking smile.

Mr. Rimmon took a piece of buttered toast, and bit out a section.

"You've forgotten to ask a blessing," put in Keziah. "Those people who lack the reality cannot dispense with the forms. I should advise you to ask a blessing."

"I asked one inwardly," replied Mr. Rimmon solemnly.

"Gently, gently," said his daughter, her forefinger raised impressively, and her tone implying doubt.

"You're a very undutiful child," said Mr. Rimmon, quite understanding her; "and it is written, 'Cursed be——'"

"I won't listen to that," broke in Keziah, putting her fingers into her ears; "and I've got such a piece of news for you. Will you have it before or after prayers, or shall we toss up for it? First, please to get up from the table, and take that paper from the chimneypiece," she went on, her face brimming over with merriment.

Dignity said, No; but curiosity, which was uppermost, caused Mr. Rimmon to do what his daughter had desired.

“What does this mean, Keziah?” he asked, in sepulchral tones.

“Just what it says, father,” answered the girl. “And don’t you think it’s a little too bad, now,” she added, her face grown quite serious, “to make poor mother go without so many things, when you give ten guineas to a subscription for Heaven knows what?”

“Kizzy,” said Mr. Rimmon, trying to be stern, but considerably abashed, “I’ve yet to learn that children have a right to dictate to their parents; and while you are under my roof, will you oblige me by discontinuing to use ‘Heaven,’ and such expressions, in an irreverent spirit?”

Keziah’s great eyes flashed angrily now; but she answered in a soft, gentle voice, with an appallingly true ring in it, “I don’t believe I am irreverent, father; but if you will leave off your irreverent use of holy things, I will gladly follow your example.” Mrs. Rimmon had commenced to cry. “I must tell you,” said Keziah, “that I consider you to be a hypocrite”—she dwelt markedly upon the words. “You cannot feel all the Bible teaches and treat

mother as you do ;” and the frank eyes looked unflinchingly into her father’s, and his eyes dropped before them.

“ It matters little for myself,” went on Keziah, in a lighter manner, “ how angry you may get with me : it is mother I care about, and,” she added, as if by a sudden inspiration, the bright eyes becoming soft and tender once more, “ I shall have a new home soon, I’m going to be married.”

“ Going to be what !” almost shrieked the father and mother simultaneously. “ Why, you are not seventeen,” exclaimed Mr. Rimmon.

“ That’s true,” said Keziah, “ but I’m seven-and-twenty in experience, thanks to your training.”

Mr. Rimmon had abstractedly upset his tea, and was now made aware of the fact by its dripping slowly on to his check trousers. The tea was very hot, and the trousers fitted tightly, so Joshua got the full benefit of it. He pretended to ignore the fact, however, and hid the anguish he was enduring under the icy tones in which he replied to his daughter—

“ And perhaps you will tell me who the man is you are carrying on all this nonsense with ! ”

“I will,” said the girl; “his name is Rupert Edmonton.”

After Keziah’s last announcement, Mr. Rimmon walked silently from the room with a very dejected countenance. He was thinking of Rupert Edmonton, not as a man, for he knew him only by name as a successful doctor in Leamington, but as an obstacle to other plans he had formed for his daughter—or rather plans which another had formed, whom he felt compelled to obey. The news of the projected marriage thoroughly upset him. His daughter, noting the troubled expression, and attributing it to anything but the real cause, of which she, poor child, knew nothing, ran swiftly after him into the passage, where he was taking down his great-coat. Her heart smote her. What right had she to judge her father?

“Father, dear,” she said, laying the softest little hand upon his sleeve, “forgive me, I ——” and here she burst into a flood of tears.

Mr. Rimmon felt himself quite in a corner. It was the sharpest reproof Keziah could have administered, this contrition, this affection; and at the

moment, too, when his whole mind was engrossed in thwarting her plans. With evident effort he said, patting her in a paternal fashion upon the shoulder—

“There, there, don’t cry, Kizzy, we’ll say no more about it. It was very unfair of you to call me a hypocrite.” And by this time Mr. Rimmon had recovered his dignity a little.

“I know, I know,” sobbed Keziah; “I have done very wrong.”

Mr. Rimmon could not help showing his triumph in his face. Perhaps his daughter would turn out more easy to deal with than he had imagined in this affair.

“Father,” said Keziah, looking up earnestly, “it would have been better if I had come and begged you to act differently to mother.”

“My dear Keziah,” observed Mr. Rimmon, with great dignity, “it is not in your province to interfere in any way with me. There, dry your eyes and go to your mother, and be a better girl in future.” He left her, and she stood there until the hall door banged, and she knew he had gone.

How many times had the poor girl, after an

outburst of impetuous anger, gone to that father, full of contrition and tenderness, and found no response; there had been something in his manner that froze her, and left a very desolate feeling. "No," she said to herself sadly, "father can't be a good man; yet he is my father," and there was a great grief at her heart as she went back into the dining-room and sat down, with her little hands crossed disconsolately in her lap, and a most pathetic look upon her face.





CHAPTER VI.

RUPERT EDMONTON.



EZIAH RIMMON had been a day boarder at a middle-class boarding school in Jumley, and being what was called "finished," and yet uneducated, she had been harassed not a little by the thought that she must take a situation of some kind and was not fit to be a teacher. All through her school life she had looked forward to this moment when she should be free to go forth into the world and find a life more congenial to her. Unlike the majority of girls who leave their homes on such a quest, Keziah had, figuratively speaking, fallen upon her feet. She had answered an advertisement for a young companion of a lively disposition to the only

daughter of a widow living at Leamington, and she had got the situation.

She only announced her intention of leaving home when everything was agreed upon ; and Mr. Rimmon had had a momentary battle in his mind betwixt dislike at losing the only bright thing in his house, and mercenary motives. Avarice conquered.

The six months which she had passed in this situation had been the happiest in Keziah's life. The mother of the young lady whom it was her duty to amuse was the widow of a wealthy tradesman, very good-hearted and very extravagant, lavishing upon her daughter Lucy everything she could desire ; and all Lucy had, Kizzy shared, besides receiving an ample yearly sum which Mrs. Beredith termed an acknowledgment and not a salary.

It was at the Berediths' that Kizzy first met Rupert Edmonton, a rising surgeon, who managed somehow to find leisure to look in on them frequently, though sometimes it was only to shake hands and go away. People began to think Miss Lucy was the attraction.

The first visit that Rupert Edmonton had paid

to the Berediths after Keziah's advent advanced matters no further than that he and Keziah scrutinised each other. Each found the other worthy of study. He thought, while he was talking to Mrs. Beredith, and his eyes wandered towards and dwelt upon Keziah, seated by Lucy, engaged upon some fancy work, "how pale the moon grows when the sun shines." Lucy, with her light-brown, smooth hair simply knotted behind, with her innocent blue eyes, had a sort of prettiness; but this other girl—she was enough to set any one's blood on fire. How could one human being have such a dower of glorious beauty? A resolved bachelor he, yet his heart beat faster at the sight of Kizzy. He had heard men describe this terrible sensation; he had never in his life experienced it before. There was something that made him feel as he left the house that night that he was no longer free. He knew he should be attracted back by the magnetism of those melting eyes.

Kizzy had looked at him too. She saw a tall and somewhat slender man, with pale, straight features, and a look in the grey eyes of strong will

and settled melancholy. She could scarcely have told why, but she longed to ask Lucy if he came often, or when he would come again; yet she could not bring herself to ask this.

That night, when alone in her room, she looked at herself critically for the first time. It is only as the harbinger of love that real coquetry comes. Hitherto she had had but a contempt for that beauty which meant nothing to her, which had brought upon her more annoyance than anything else. Now she looked upon it in a totally different light: she was vaguely glad that she was beautiful.

The following evening Mrs. Beredith herself broached the subject of the young surgeon, as the three ladies sat working together in their pleasant drawing-room. "He is such a clever doctor," she said, "and he's really very nice when you know him. He's had trouble, I'm sure. This is the only house he visits in a friendly way. He hasn't a relation in the world."

Kizzy's fingers involuntarily stopped in her work, and her face assumed a far-away look. The object of this conversation entered while it was going on,

shook hands with Mrs. Beredith and Lucy, and then with Keziah. Oh, that little hand, how soft and white it was. He, a staid man of thirty, felt thrown off his balance for a moment at that sweet contact. He did not stay long, and did not exchange a word with Keziah; but from this time he dropped in almost every day. Without seeming to notice her, he soon knew every curve of the figure, could have told the precise fashion of the red ribbon at her throat, and had burnt into his memory all the hundred expressions which that mobile face passed through in a single hour.

After a few weeks, Edmonton seemed to take some firm resolve, and it was many days before the Berediths saw him again. How terribly long are some days in youth! It was in these days that Kizzy learnt that hope deferred makes the heart sick. Every ring at the bell during the evening quickened her pulse, and left her paralysed. This grave, serious man, who had scarcely spoken to her, irresistibly attracted her opposite nature.

At the end of a fortnight Mrs. Beredith, never guessing at the cause, became so troubled at

Keziah's pale looks as to talk seriously of sending for Edmonton.

"Oh, please don't," exclaimed Keziah, a rich colour mounting to her cheeks, "I am sure I'm quite well." And she seemed to mentally shake herself as does a Newfoundland dog fresh from the water, and became gay—unnaturally gay. She thought to herself, "What am I here for?"

The young doctor had been steeling himself these few days, and prided himself that he had conquered the passing passion that this wonderful face had aroused in him; and he paid another visit to the Berediths in a very heroic frame of mind. He ought never to marry, he knew that. Then why play the coward? And in the pride of strength his visits became frequent again. He told his conscience that the interest that the paleness on this lovely girl's cheek had aroused in him was of a strictly professional character, and that the returned bloom was due to a bottle of mixture he had insisted on her taking.

As time passed on, Kizzy's shyness wore off, and she began to exhibit the merry side of her character

freely. On one occasion Edmonton was the only one who did not smile at a joke she made ; and she, turning the full glory of her radiant face upon him, said, saucily, " Shall I explain the joke to you, Dr. Edmonton ? "

He replied, " Don't take the trouble to do that, Miss Rimmon. I don't take much interest in jokes, and I never indulge in them myself. "

" I will tell you why, " rejoined Kizzy, who was in one of her wild, daring moods ; " it is one of two things. You are very vain, and you think you don't look well when you smile ; or you are incapable of seeing the joke, and are sharp enough to be aware of the fact. So you put on the cloak of pretended scorn. "

Mrs. Beredith and Lucy were aghast. They knew that Kizzy could run on wildly enough at times, but this had always been when they had been alone, hitherto.

But Rupert Edmonton did smile, and did not look at all bad when he smiled.

" There, " said Kizzy, beaming. " Look at yourself in the glass, and perhaps you will laugh often. "

The little volley from the seductive lips had broken down a barrier Rupert had believed invulnerable. He looked almost despairingly at Keziah, as much as to say "What have you done?" and he took his leave almost at once.

He went away as a man who had now no choice to make. Those bright glances, the music of that voice, had bound him in the meshes of a stronger net than that of the fate which would have kept him from her.

His face was even graver when he came back the next night, at a later hour than usual. Mrs. Beredith and Lucy were deep in some housekeeping discussion which involved many figures. It was quite natural that Rupert should talk to Kizzy, who was not so preoccupied. They somehow or other found themselves at the piano, turning over the music together. All in a moment, Lucy and her mother quitted the room. Edmonton, with his heart beating wildly, gently imprisoned the little hand that hung by Keziah's side in his; and as Keziah, with cheeks that grew pale, dropped her eyelids, he said, in a tone she had never heard him speak in before,

tenderly raising her face with his disengaged hand—

“No, do not be afraid to look at me.”

The lovely eyes glanced into his for an instant, and dropped again.

The glance fired his whole nature. He raised the hand and laid it upon his heart. “Kizzy, my darling, does that tell you anything?” he said.

She drew her hand away, gently but firmly. “I don’t know what to say to you,” she replied, averting her face.

Mrs. Beredith and Lucy entering, made further conversation upon this impossible; and Edmonton had to take his leave without any more communication with Kizzy, except that he held her hand a moment longer than was necessary in saying good-bye.

It was some days after this, before Kizzy gave him another opportunity of speaking to her. Yet in these days she had been wholly absorbed in one thought, the glad future that seemed opening out before her. The next occasion on which this pair met alone, was one of fortune’s sending, rather than the result of any planning. Kizzy had gone on a

message for Mrs. Beredith, to make inquiries about a sick friend. Lucy had some letters to write, and did not accompany her. On the steps of the very house, whom should she encounter but Edmonton himself. The large hat she wore partially shaded her face.

"I am glad of this chance meeting, Miss Rimmon," said the doctor deferentially, extending his hand. "You have given me no opportunity of speaking to you for days and days. I hope you are not angry with me."

"No, I am not angry," she replied, looking down.

"Then do me a great kindness," he said, with much animation for one of his quiet temperament. "Walk with me a little, I will lead the horse. I want to explain myself a little to you."

She hesitated. "I was going to ask how Miss Finch is," she said, in a faint voice.

"You can do that as you come back," he suggested. "She has but a trifling indisposition. You do not ask how I am, though perhaps I'm a real sufferer. Kizzy, don't trifle with me. I've had too much sorrow already in my life. Come, let me ex-

plain myself to you a little, and then, let me know my fate."

There was such a look of pain in his face that she mechanically walked away by his side, while he told her how, till he saw her, he had determined never to marry. She must not ask him the reason. It was for her sake if he did not tell her. But he could never have made such a resolve if he had ever seen her. Would she make him happy in spite of that hidden sorrow of his, or leave him with the winter in his heart, all the more bitter that the sun had shone out for a brief moment? "Kizzy, you are a terrible judge," he said, taking her by both hands, and letting his horse wander on. "No criminal ever awaited sentence with more trembling than I await one little word from you."

How it came about, Kizzy could never have told. But the strong arm was around her, and his lips touched hers.





CHAPTER VII.

JOSHUA RIMMON IN SEVERAL LIGHTS.



THE news of Keziah's projected marriage caused more dismay to Mr. Rimmon than can be easily imagined, without knowing the state of his affairs; and he was by no means sure that he should be able to dissuade his daughter, either by parental authority or an appeal to her affections. This girl had a conscience. It was a question whether anything he could say would make it appear right to her mind that she should throw over her lover. He had heard somewhere that there was some mystery connected with Dr. Edmonton. Mystery is generally discreditable, thought Joshua. If, now, he could possess himself of any information that would tell

powerfully against the young man. One thing was clear, there must be immediate action on his part. He must go and view the ground, without any matured plan it might be, but at once. So the very next morning, he went earlier than usual to the bank, came home to an early lunch, ordered his dog-trap, drove to the railway station, and took a ticket for Leamington.

It was a short journey, and the winter sun was still high when Mr. Rimmon presented himself at Rupert Edmonton's lodgings. He was not at home. "I will wait till he comes," said Mr. Rimmon; "please show me to his sitting-room."

The servant led the way up a very dark staircase. On the top stair, Mr. Rimmon stood till the girl had opened a door on the landing. Once in the sitting-room, Mr. Rimmon waited till the girl's footsteps had died away, and then quietly locked the door. The walls were covered with works of art, but these attracted none of Mr. Rimmon's attention. His eyes were riveted upon a large, handsome desk which stood on a small table. Mr. Rimmon, with an iron setting of the muscles of his face, advanced

towards this, and took a small bunch of skeleton keys from his pocket, with one of which he speedily unlocked it.

The first things that met his gaze were the young man's diplomas. These he examined, and found to his astonishment that they ran, not in the name of Rupert Edmonton, but of James Elworthy. It never occurred to him to doubt that these two were the same person; and with a look of having discovered something at least, he replaced the diplomas, and made some notes in his pocket-book.

His search was next rewarded by an envelope containing something written and addressed to his daughter. He hesitated not a moment to read it. His eyes dilated as he read, how when the young doctor was a medical student, a number of them lodged in the same house, somewhere in Germany. Quarrels had arisen between himself and one of his fellow-students, as he was naturally hot-tempered. One man, a German, Otto Müller by name, had particularly provoked him, and they had once nearly come to blows, and this in public. There was another young student there at the same time who

disliked Otto very thoroughly, but was much beloved by Edmonton. Otto and this young man, whose name was not mentioned in the document, loved the same woman. Finally, one night Otto was discovered murdered in his own room, and Edmonton was the first to find the body. He had been intending to leave Germany the next day, having received his diplomas. He was going the round of his friends to say good-bye, and something caused him to call on Otto first; he would not leave at enmity with anybody: he found him murdered.

He could not avoid suspecting his friend of being the murderer. "I am alone in the world," he said to himself. "I can disappear, and the blame will not be laid at *his* door." He managed to get away very successfully. His disappearance had the effect he had expected. He was sought for as a murderer; but he had never been found, nor was it likely he ever would be.

"Indeed!" said Mr. Rimmon, as he read this.

This recital finished with a passionate appeal to Keziah. The last lines were merely abuse of him-

self for being so weak as to engage the affections of a pure girl, when he had this sword hanging over his head. She should not marry him in ignorance of it.

All this, and the passionate expressions of love, Mr. Rimmon passed over with disdain; but his hands were trembling violently as he took down the name of the German town mentioned. A great fear seized him now, lest a footstep should come on the stairs before he had closed the desk. He put the paper back into its envelope, and left the desk pretty much as he had found it : then unlocked the door and walked downstairs.

He was intoxicated with his good fortune. He almost felt righteous, in that he was to save his daughter from such a fate ; for his heart told him that, were this document posted to Keziah, she would marry the doctor all the more for it. He would arrange matters. He would leave a message, and no name, and make good his escape.

But as he was walking downstairs he lost his footing, and completed the journey to the bottom on his back, just as the doctor entered the house. Not

knowing Mr. Rimmon in the least, he sprang to his aid, and raised him into a sitting posture. After inquiries of a surgical nature, which satisfied Edmonton that there was no serious injury, Mr. Rimmon was persuaded to go into the surgery and take something. "You've had a nasty shake," said the doctor; "you must have this glass of wine." Mr. Rimmon replied that he was a teetotaller.

"I'll put it in a medicine bottle if you like," said Edmonton.

"Do you know who I am, sir?" remarked Mr. Rimmon, somewhat recovered.

"Not in the least."

"My name is Joshua Rimmon; and, being in Leamington, I looked in to thank you for your kindness to my daughter, and to ask you to come to see us."

Edmonton was thunderstruck. It was the last thing he would have expected of Mr. Rimmon, from what he had gathered from Keziah, though she had smoothed all accounts of her father as far as possible. He lost no time in making his future father-in-law comfortable; for it was clear that fortune was upon

love's side. It was a good omen. Kizzy would not let that knowledge he was about to communicate to her, separate them. Tea was ordered in, and Mr. Rimmon, like another betrayer, ate bread with the man he was about to betray.

"You may not have heard a very good account of me from my daughter," said Mr. Rimmon grandly. "Kizzy and I never hit it off quite. She is a high-spirited girl. But I have a father's heart in this bosom," he said, theatrically placing his hand over the breast-pocket containing the pocket-book in which he had made notes in reference to his host.

"Kizzy has never spoken of you but as a dutiful daughter might speak," said Edmonton.

"I can afford to settle something upon Kizzy, you know," said the delighted father.

Edmonton insisted emphatically that he would take nothing with the girl he married; he had quite enough for them both, and a family too, if God should send one. And he thought inwardly, "How wrong it is to judge hastily of people. I have always had the idea that this man ill-treated his daughter." It was infinitely preferable to be able to respect his

father-in-law; and he gave Mr. Rimmon quite a hearty shake of the hand when he went away.

He could not help noticing that Mr. Rimmon's hand was icy-cold. The arrival of a patient prevented his thinking over these strange events till later.

Mr. Rimmon went straight to the telegraph office and sent off the following message:—

Joshua Rimmon, Leamington, to Chief of Police,——

James Elworthy, whom you seek for Otto Müller's affair, is at —— Street, here, passing as Rupert Edmonton. Keep my name out of it.

Having despatched his telegram, Mr. Rimmon made his way to the railway station, and bestowed himself quickly in a carriage, for a train was in waiting. He did not notice that another person was in the compartment, until the train had started, when a voice accosted him with—

“Well, Rimmon, you don't know me then:” this in a highly sarcastic tone.

“You here, Hackbit?”

“Well, yes, I took the liberty of following you to Leamington to-day. You had forgotten to tell me you were going.”

“And what did you follow me for?” said Mr. Rimmon petulantly. “You ought to know I should tell you.”

“Drop that confounded acting with me,” replied Mr. Hackbit. “If I’ve helped you to get many a pound, do you think it’s for love of you? You are much mistaken if you do. ’Tis that I mean it to come some day into my hands, along with your beautiful daughter.”

“You seem to forget altogether that I have a son.”

“Your son may get disinherited,” rejoined the other with a cunning grin. “I want to know when it’s to be settled between your daughter and me. You’ve been to see that Edmonton to-day. I’ve had my eye on him too. Kizzy won’t marry him.”

“I’ve settled that business. Of course you must marry Keziah. Now about the other affairs. You got that bill of sale signed all right, did you?”

“Yes,” said Hackbit, shortly.

“You are quite certain they don’t know what it was?”

“Do you take me for a fool?”

“Not exactly; but you know we managed one affair very badly, and nearly got let through. I should be more comfortable if you left off drinking. It would be ruination if my name appeared mixed up with these things.”

“I’ll take care of your good character as long as it’s useful to me,” said Hackbit.

“What sum of money was it you lent them?”

“Thirty pounds.”

“The usual terms?”

“Well, not exactly,” replied Hackbit. “These are women, and more gullible. They are to pay back ten pounds a month for six months—five pounds for principal and five for interest. I put in an execution at the Simpsons’, and a confounded bother they’ve been.”

“Well, well, I don’t want any particulars; that’s in our agreement. I pay you to do my business for me, on the understanding that you spare me all details.”

“Hang it all, I haven’t given you any details, have I?” rejoined Hackbit pettishly. “I can tell you one thing, I’m getting deucedly tired of lodgings. You had better hurry on that affair with Keziah.”

“We mustn’t hurry her,” replied Mr. Rimmon timorously. “You see she’s in love with that Edmonton. She would never hear of it if we were to press her now.”

“It ought to go for something that I am her cousin,” said Hackbit; “her own father’s sister’s child, and a flourishing solicitor.”

“She’s got rather a contempt for her family, I think. She favoured me with a long paragraph from one of George Dawson’s lectures one day, all about natural ties being no ties, merit being the only standard for affection.”

“Why did you let her go to those lectures?” said Hackbit.

“Do you think I can prevent her going where she likes?” answered the father.

“You ought to. Men like George Dawson and Thomas Cooper inspire rebellion.”

"If you want to marry Kizzy," said Mr. Rimmon, "I would advise you to keep your views about Dawson and Cooper to yourself."

"Leave me to manage my own affairs," was Hackbit's rejoinder.

"You never leave me to manage mine," retorted Rimmon.

"Because you are such a fool in some things. What have you sent that boy of yours to the Saltrings' for? They'll teach him to find you out."

"Nonsense," replied Mr. Rimmon; "what can they get to know to my discredit?"

"Oh, nothing," said Hackbit with a sneer; "but send the knife to the grinder's to be sharpened, and somebody will take it up to cut with. Jubal won't come back quite so blind as he went away. I know something of these Saltrings, and they are a lot too sharp."

"That will make no difference," said Mr. Rimmon gruffly; "Kizzy has found me out, and Kizzy has never been to the Saltrings'."

"Your daughter is intellectually as much above her brother and her father as she surpasses them in

personal attractions," said Hackbit, stating the fact mildly, as if it bore no reference to his companion.

"Kizzy is very sharp," replied Mr. Rimmon, knowing it would not pay to show his vexation at the last speech. "You may find Kizzy too sharp for you yet. She's an angel on one side, but she's a Tartar when she thinks people are doing wrong." Mr. Rimmon glanced at his companion's face as he said this, to mark the effect of his words.

"I know women better than you do," said Hackbit crossly.

"One class of women, no doubt," replied Mr. Rimmon. "But in one respect, at least, I think I know women better than you do. They are altogether more powerful creatures than men give them credit for."

"Bosh!" shouted Hackbit, with sudden energy. "One specimen of that sort would be enough for me: and look here, Rimmon, no more beating about the bush; I will have this marriage arranged. My silence is for sale; and the price is—your beautiful daughter."

Mr. Rimmon made no reply to this.

When they arrived at Jumley station, Rimmon asked Hackbit to come up and take some refreshment at his house.

“ Oh, no, thank you,” replied Hackbit, scornfully ; “ you never have anything fit to eat in your house. Your wife cannot be one of the strong-minded women you have been describing, or she would get at your purse-strings.”

With a surly good-night, Rimmon left him and went home on foot.





CHAPTER VIII.

NEW YEAR'S EVE AT THE SALTRINGS'.



IT was New Year's Eve, and the house of Saltring was ablaze with lights and gay dresses. It was a custom with the Saltrings to dance the old year out in the company of as many friends as they could get together. The large drawing-room was cleared for dancing, and decked with evergreens and holly. The Towers were there, and Maud Harwyn and her brother. It was on this evening that Jubal was to walk his first quadrille, after many hours of tedious rehearsing in the family.

Mr. Saltring was in his glory. Nothing pleased him better than to fill his house with guests, and treat them magnificently. The tea-room was full of people, and Mr. Saltring took Lawyer Layton by the

arm and led him into the drawing-room. "Is anything the matter?" he said.

"Oh, no," replied Layton.

"What's the good of deceiving me!" said Saltring. "Were we not chums at school? I am quite sure something is troubling you. Open your heart, and the cloud may pass away. Besides," added he, "I am not afraid of hearing a man's troubles, for fear I shall be obliged to help him."

"You're a good fellow," answered Layton. "You always were. The trouble on my mind is not a business one at all. It has reference to Miss Harwyn."

"Miss Harwyn!" exclaimed Mr. Saltring, much puzzled. "What can trouble you about her?"

"Well, the fact is, she's a very fine girl, and I fear she may be on the verge of wrecking her life. Since she has been staying with us, my wife discovered, by pure accident, that she and young Towers had met before, and Maud appears to be attached to him."

"But you don't know anything against him, do you?" said Mr. Saltring gravely.

“I do not; but you know as well as I do, that there is some extraordinary cloud over that family; and my experience as a lawyer tells me that these mysteries are generally guilty ones.”

“My dear Layton,” answered Mr. Saltring deprecatingly, “that’s not generous of you, not at all generous.”

“Lawyers cannot afford to be generous,” replied Layton, “in their judgments. They must not be blinded by generosity or sympathy or anything of that kind. They must be neutral. A lawyer must have no emotions. He must only study and seek to stir the emotions of others.”

“I am no match for you in argument, I know,” said Saltring. “But perhaps this attachment has not gone far; you may be able to use your influence.”

“The worst of it is,” replied Layton, “that in affairs of the heart there are no axioms to guide one. It is as if a supernatural power were driving a soul to one certain end, and whatever influences are brought to bear upon it from outside, combine with and help the force already at work within.”

“There’s one thing I believe is a help,” rejoined Saltring, “and that is prayer.”

The lawyer looked at him in amazement. “That sentiment from you, Saltring!”

“Why not?”

“Pardon me, I had no idea you held those views.”

“Because I don’t carry a cant about with me, I suppose. Let me tell you once for all, I do believe in it; and it is a mystery to me how men can go on living and enduring the sorrows that come to everyone, the great loneliness which is, after all, the condition of every human soul—I say I wonder how men do not put an end to their lives, if they have no belief in a pitying Providence and the power of prayer.”

“You astound me,” said Layton.

The conversation was interrupted here by the entrance of the dancers. Forms and ceremonies were not much observed in this house; but one form Mr. Saltring never omitted was to lead his wife out at the top of the first quadrille. Layton, who did not dance, watched this performance with

a good deal of fresh interest. He had seen his friend to-night in a totally new light, and an unsuspected one. He was deep in thought about it all, when a sweet odour of heliotrope wafted past him, and he glanced up to see his favourite whirled away by the doctor's new assistant.

If he were uneasy at the sight, so was someone else. That someone was Dr. Towers himself. His massive figure leaned against a doorpost, and his eyes had a troubled expression in them. Layton happening to glance that way, noticed this. "Ah," he thought to himself, "I know there is a reason; but that man knows the reason."

If Layton were quick to observe, so was Dr. Towers. He caught the lawyer's glance directed towards him, smiled sarcastically, and changed his position.

A new interest now took possession of the lawyer. Laura Saltring was dancing with Gerald Harwyn, and Jubal Rimmon looked on with fury in his face. Laura evidently perceived this, and was provokingly attentive to her partner. "A child like that, is it possible?" thought the lawyer. "She

has all the arts of a coquettish woman. I wonder her father doesn't notice it. And what a terrible look that mere schoolboy has on his face! What will that boy develop into?"

When the quadrille was over, Mr. Saltring came back to his friend. "I am getting too stout to dance, Layton," he remarked, with his good-natured smile. "But I fancy it makes the young folks enjoy themselves better if I enter into it too; and I often tell my children there is no reason why they shouldn't always be as joyous as they are now; so I must set them the example."

"Nevertheless," said Layton, "it is not true of the majority."

"I never feel dismal, for my part," said Saltring. "I believe I am the most fortunate man living."

While they had been talking, Maud Harwyn and young Towers had passed out of the room together, and seated themselves in the cool entrance hall.

"How strange it is that I should have met you here, of all places!" said Maud. "You never told me you had an uncle in practice."

Towers did not offer any explanation.

"You don't seem glad to see me," went on Maud.

"You know that is not true," the young man answered.

"Well, I am sure you did not look pleased when you met me the other night," rejoined Maud, rather pettishly. "I thought people showed themselves pleased to meet their friends."

"It would have been better for me had I never seen you," the young man said gloomily.

"And why, pray?" Maud asked, the colour leaving her face.

"Because"—and his face was white now—"I love you, and we can never be anything to each other."

"Do explain yourself," said Maud.

"I cannot; but I shall marry no one else. Let that stand for something."

"You are behaving very cruelly to me."

"On the contrary, I am doing you a kind action. It is myself I am cruel to. I beg of you, Maud, do me the kindness of meeting me as little as possible. I am not free to leave this place. You are. Why not go?"

"I cannot understand you," she said faintly, and with evident effort.

"I cannot make it clear to you, I can only abhor myself for the selfishness which has brought you this trouble. I did very wrong to let my love for you grow. I now pay the cost, and seek to make what reparation I can."

"Tell me, why did you not stay in London and complete your qualification?"

"I cannot explain that either. Have pity on me and leave the neighbourhood. While you are here, I have no strength to keep away from you. I knew you would be here to-night, and I came. Act for me. Every time I see you, the chain tightens its hold. I, of all men in the world, must love no woman."

"Do not end it so," pleaded Maud. "There may be some great mistake. Things may not be as they seem. I will wait."

"You must not," answered the young man, tightening his grasp of her wrist. "Marry some good man as soon as possible; do it—do it for my sake."

Maud's colour rose, and she took offence. "Men always serve women so," she said. "As if affection were like goods and chattels, to be so transferred. You could never really have cared for me. If you had, you would have suffered death rather than separation, as I would."

Her companion turned a ghastly face upon her, and echoed her words, "death," "separation," in a strange, far-away tone. Maud started from her seat and brusquely left him. She made her way to the dining-room, where refreshments were laid, and poured out a glass of wine for herself. She had scarcely taken it, when a gentleman claimed her for the next dance. It was a waltz, and she danced it as though her life depended on it. Her brother, noticing her, thought to himself, "Whatever can have made Maud so angry. It must be that young Towers; I never liked his hanging about her so much."

It was past eleven o'clock, yet new guests arrived; and they brought with them some extraordinary news, which spread like wildfire through the company. Dr. Edmonton, of Leamington, had

been apprehended by some foreign police on a charge of murder. Rupert was well known and much liked in Langton, and had been called in in consultation many times.

The people, however, whom the news seemed to affect most were the Towers, especially the assistant, who turned a ghastly face on Mr. Saltring, who exclaimed, "Do you know him?"

"No," replied Towers, with a kind of gulp; but the "no" sounded almost like a yes.

"What awful news to come on New Year's Eve," observed Mr. Saltring.

No more dancing could be thought of, such a gloom seemed to settle on the company.

"I don't believe he's guilty," said Mr. Saltring fervently. "He will get off, you will see."

Somebody groaned. Mr. Saltring looked round to see who it was; but nobody was to be seen behind him.

"Many a good man has been accused wrongly," he went on. "I must have the strongest proof the world can offer, before I'll believe. This is only some terrible mistake. It will all end well."

But the spirit of festivity could not be revived by any cheering words, and the party broke up ; and as the front door opened to let out the first who left, the church bells rang out merrily for the New Year.





CHAPTER IX.

NEW YEAR'S EVE AT THE RIMMONS'.

NEW Year's Eve was a great day with the Rimmons, inasmuch as it was the only day in all the year when Mr. Rimmon invited a few friends to partake of his hospitality, and these consisted chiefly of members of his own family : David Rimmon, his brother, considerably younger than himself, a manufacturer of cotton cloth, residing at Manchester; Mrs. Rimmon, Joshua's aged mother, supposed in Jumley to be eccentric, if not out of her mind, living alone in a little cottage with a small maidservant, and never seeing anyone except her son, whom report said she greatly repulsed; Miss Dorcas Rimmon, Joshua's unmarried sister, a milliner and dressmaker,

residing in Jumley ; and last, but by no means least, Thomas Hackbit, solicitor, who always addressed his uncle as “ Rimmon,” and never as “ uncle ” except on the rare occasions of its being necessary to emphasize the relationship.

Early on the morning of this day, Mr. Rimmon had been busily engaged with his nephew in the perusal of a bundle of letters written by Rupert Edmonton to his daughter, of which he had surreptitiously possessed himself. These had been carefully put back, and Kizzy had never missed them. The pair had heard that Rupert had been apprehended, but kept it carefully secret from Kizzy, to avoid unpleasantness on this day of festivity.

Kizzy and her mother were up before daybreak, uncovering the musty drawing-room furniture, and lighting a fire in that room early because the chimney would be damp and would surely smoke. The piano had been carried in there, and the best album was put out. All the silver had to be unpacked out of baize, and polished ; glass and china to be washed ; and the best tablecloth to be pressed. Upstairs the spare room had to be set in order, a white quilt laid

on the bedstead, a cover upon the dressing-table, and a scent bottle partly filled with scent of a vague and uncertain odour, which had done duty for several years, placed ready for use. Then the cooking was something considerable. There would be a turkey for dinner, and two vegetables. The plum-pudding had to be boiled, and mince-pies baked. It was in reality a terrible labour and a terrible trial to poor Mrs. Rimmon. It required an apprenticeship in the art of managing a small open grate to get all this cooking done at all; and of course the meat-hastener, in which the turkey was suspended, got out of order on this particular day, and the turkey would keep stopping, till Sarah declared it was one person's work to keep "that there turkey from burning." Then there was nothing like room enough for all the saucepans at the top of the grate. In fact the one containing the plum-pudding was nearly up the chimney.

Dinner was to be ready at two o'clock, and ten minutes before that time Mrs. Rimmon, very hot and trembling, either owing to the work or over-anxiety, went upstairs to don her black silk gown,

which had lain hidden away in lavender since last New Year's Eve. It looked sadly the worse for wear about the elbows, and a good deal out of date ; yet Mrs. Rimmon felt a sort of glory in having it on. " Oh, mother dear," said Kizzy, looking at her arrayed in the garment, " you shall have a new black silk. I won't change my dress at all to-day," she added, with a brave determination not to look better dressed than her mother ; and with a great deal of tenderness she put a touch here and there to the attire of her mother to give her a better appearance. Just as she fastened a dainty lace collar to her neck, there was a knock and a ring, and Mrs. and Miss Rimmon were announced.

Mrs. Joshua met them at the foot of the stairs, and hoped they were well.

" Mother's going downhill fast," replied Dorcas. " I don't believe she knows you."

The elder Mrs. Rimmon did indeed greet her daughter with a cold stare which betokened no recognition, and remained quite silent until asked if she would go upstairs to take her things off.

" No, I shan't set foot there," she said, in a

querulous tone ; and then, departing from the subject, remarked that she was a useless creature, and she should die in the workhouse yet.

Her daughter gave her a friendly shake up on hearing this, and bade her hold her tongue, which treatment did not tend to reassure the old dame. "Would you believe it, Ann," Dorcas said, "she's been talking about that workhouse all the time I dressed her, after I'd taken all the trouble to go round and see she turned out decent, too?"

Mrs. Rimmon, senior, here showed a disposition to sit down upon the stairs, for which act of impoliteness she was duly reprimanded by Dorcas, who, seizing her bonnet strings, rather dragged than took off her bonnet and shawl, after which operation she said, "We may as well set her up at the table to wait for dinner, Ann."

But Kizzy had come upon the scene, and she broke out, with flashing indignant eyes, "Well, Aunt Dorcas, if mother stands by and sees you put on grandmother, I won't. You ought to be ashamed to treat her so."

Dorcas called her niece a pert hussy, and taking

her mother rather roughly by one arm, was about to lead her into the dining-room and "set her up," but Kizzy, full of youthful vigour, put her aunt aside, and taking her grandmother's withered hand, gently led her into the dining-room, darting a look, contemptuous and menacing, at her aunt as she went.

The touch of Keziah's gentle hand acted like magic on the old woman, and the spirit awoke in the worn body and lit the sunken eyes for a moment, and she said, "Thou art not a Rimmon, child."

"For the present I am, grandmother," replied Keziah, all the anger having died out of her face, a bright smile replacing it. "But I'm going to be married." She placed her in her father's easy chair by the fire, with a footstool for her feet and a cushion for her back; and the old lady said, "I know you now—you are Kizzy, my little singing-bird. I have something to tell you."

Kizzy bent her head to hear better.

"Never get married," said the grandmother emphatically. Kizzy would have said something in reply to this, but that she saw that the light of intelligence died out of her grandmother's eyes.

In the meantime Mrs. and Miss Rimmon had gone upstairs to the spare room, and at this very moment Dorcas was surveying herself in the looking-glass with evident satisfaction, although the reflection there visible, we will answer for it, was not such as to give anybody else any satisfaction. But perhaps she looked at herself with a dressmaker's eyes, and it was her dress, rather than the form it covered, which attracted her. This latter bore some resemblance to a board. The head above the dress was crowned by a mass of copper-coloured hair, drawn so severely away from the forehead as to cause the spectator to think of scalping by a new method, and at the same time keeping her eyebrows considerably elevated—no, not her eyebrows, but the place where they should have been. Her eyes, grey and narrow, and set too close to her nose, gave her a cunning appearance, especially when she smiled; her chin protruded too far; and her face was thickly freckled. Yet, we assert, she was looking at herself with satisfaction; while her sister-in-law, waiting for her, was inwardly quaking lest the turkey might be burning, or the potatoes be done too much.

In truth, she had reason to quake, though she knew it not ; for during her absence a quantity of soot had fallen down the kitchen chimney, and had covered the Brussels sprouts and the dishes set to warm upon the hearth. This Mrs. Joshua discovered on going to the kitchen when Miss Dorcas had liberated her. It was aggravating, and Mrs. Rimmon could not help shedding a tear or two ; for though she could not be called a woman of imagination, she did picture to herself very vividly the countenance of her lord when the spoilt dinner should be placed upon the table.

If Mrs. Rimmon counted on her husband's wrath, she was not disappointed. All were at length seated round the dinner-table. The turkey was placed before Mr. Rimmon, flanked by just four sausages. The reader may ask, Why four ? The reason was, Jumley sausages were sold eight to the pound, and Mr. Rimmon had calculated that half-a-pound could be cut into eight portions, and suffice for all his party. On Mr. Rimmon's right sat his brother David, so different from him in appearance that no one would have taken them for brothers. Mrs. Rim-

mon sat next to David. Keziah sat at the opposite end to her father, with a solitary dish of vegetables in front of her. Mr. Hackbit and Miss Dorcas occupied the other side of the table. Keziah had insisted on laying a little table before her grandmother, close to the fire.

"We will say grace," said Joshua, rising. Everybody rose and stood, with closed eyes, except Hackbit and the old lady. The former certainly rose, and amused himself with looking at all the others until the blessing concluded, when he sat down with a cynical smile upon his features.

"Please cut grandmamma's first, and I'll mince it," said Keziah. Mr. Rimmon complied, and passed a plate with a slice of the breast upon it. "Let me do it for you," said Hackbit. Kizzy looked at him searchingly before replying. He appeared sincere enough, and she allowed him to do it. He waited on the old lady throughout the dinner with assiduous attention.

At last Mr. Rimmon helped himself, and passed his plate to Keziah for vegetables. There were no Brussels sprouts, he quickly discovered. He darted

at his wife a look of majestic wrath, which made her lips tremble. Everybody saw the look, and began to eat in silence. Kizzy was silent too, though boiling inwardly with indignation. She had always a quick temper, but on this occasion she tried hard to control it, until she noticed that her father had placed his potatoes aside. Mr. Rimmon could not have Brussels sprouts; he would not have potatoes. At sight of this, Kizzy burst forth, flashing a look like a tigress at her father. Thomas Hackbit looked admiringly at her. He liked to see a fine creature in a passion, especially when it was followed by a melting mood, as it always was in Kizzy's case. Kizzy looked round the table and said, "Brussels sprouts would have been on the table to-day, but yonder miser, though he possesses houses with the newest improvements in cooking-ranges, has in his own kitchen a small, old-fashioned, ill-working open grate. I invite you all to look at it after dinner, and then you will see how an accident like the falling of soot into saucepans may occur, without anybody being to blame."

Mr. Rimmon turned green with rage. Miss

Dorcas began to be elated in prospect of a row, in which she hoped to figure. But David, who had preserved a moody silence hitherto, put in his word, and said in a conciliatory tone, "I'm sure the dinner is very nice. Don't let us have any unpleasantness to spoil it." Miss Dorcas's face became melancholy.

The old lady near the fire dropped her table-napkin, and Hackbit immediately picked it up for her without comment. David and Keziah both watched this act—the former with mistrust and uneasiness, the latter with surprise and pleasure.

The plum-pudding turned out a great success, so good-humour was restored; and Miss Dorcas began to upbraid her brother in a joking way for being still a bachelor. David had always a manner of making a great effort when he spoke even a simple thing, as if he had to wind himself up for every new sentence. It was his habit to take all jokes seriously, so he answered—

"Fortune is so fickle, Dorcas. I make it my work to keep a nest for Joshua's bairns, if they ever need one."

The full radiance of Keziah's smile was turned

upon him. She saw him now in a new light. She had hitherto thought of him as an inoffensive, silent man. Now she saw the manly and loving heart that lay hidden under his silence. Poor Kizzy was continually making an endless search for good in people, and was always getting disappointed. No wonder she was delighted to find her uncle David a man she could respect and love.

As soon as thanks were returned, all solemnly rising again, Hackbit went up to the old lady and asked her if she would go into the drawing-room with him. She did not understand him, and replied in a doleful tone—

“I always said it ’ud come to that.”

Hackbit looked much puzzled.

“I’ve slaved all my life,” she went on, “up early and late, and I shall die in the workhouse yet.”

David, who heard this remark, turned a very red face to Joshua, and observed, “I’ve never seen the home you’ve provided for mother. I think I’ll go and look at it this afternoon.”

A flash of malice and pleasure came into

Hackbit's eyes, but showed itself nowhere else on his face.

Joshua answered, "No, brother; do not break up our only day together. I've often told you mother has a strange fancy for keeping her house to herself."

The old lady heard the word "house," which awoke the old theme, and she said once more, "The house is the place for the like o' me."

"Mother," screamed Dorcas, "I'd be ashamed to be talking about the house, if I was you."

Dorcas's voice seemed to revive the old dame's faculties a bit, for her next words were very much to the point.

"He always forgets to order the coal in, and the cinders won't burn any more."

"She doesn't know what she's saying," observed Dorcas, with a wink and a nod.

David went gently towards his mother, his eyes full of tears, and said to her, "Come, mother, we'll talk a bit."

"Why, it's Davy," she said, a light breaking over her face; "but he says you won't come to see me." Then she lowered her voice and added, "And

I can't eat bacon, and the Sunday meat's so tough, I can't bite it."

Joshua became very angry, and said, "What's the good of listening to an old woman who's out of her mind? Every one in Jumley knows that I do all she will let me do for her."

Dorcas, determined to put an end to the conversation, was about to carry off her mother into the drawing-room, but Kizzy interposed. "No, aunt; grandmother's much better by this fire than going into that damp room."

"Stuff and nonsense," responded the aunt; "she isn't so nesh as all that."

"Let me stay with singing-bird," said the old lady querulously.

"So you shall," said Kizzy; and her aunt went off in a huff. David and Joshua went across the road for a turn round the garden, and Hackbit went off professedly to smoke, but in reality to get a drink at a neighbouring inn, his uncle's teetotalism not agreeing with him.

Kizzy's mind was full of the vexed question of her grandmother's true condition. Before to-day

she had always believed her father's statement that her uncle David had left the whole charge of the grandmother's maintenance upon him. It was quite evident that her father had given the old lady the impression that David would not help her. Kizzy had always believed, too, that her grandmother must be peculiar in her mind, as she invariably refused to see her, or, indeed, anyone except Dorcas and Joshua. But this had not repelled her, and on the New Year's Eve, which was the only occasion on which Keziah had met her grandmother, she did her best to make much of her.

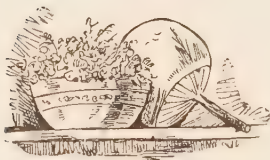
"Singing-bird," said the grandmother, beckoning her with great secrecy close to her, "*he* would never let me see you."

The words stabbed the girl to the heart, not only for the grandmother's condition, but her father's. Shred by shred the garment of his virtue had been torn off before her eyes. Could it be that he had no good at all in him? To her it was terrible to have to utterly despise her own father. She turned away into the hall, where she heard her uncle David hanging up his hat.

“Uncle,” she said mysteriously, “come with me and let us look at grandmother’s house. It is not far away. I will fetch the key out of aunt Dorcas’s bag, for there’s no one in the house, as grandmother’s little servant goes out for her holiday to-day.”

He was about to offer some objection, but she stopped him. “You must come,” she said, trying hard to check the rising tears. David looked uncomfortable, but consented. “Where is father?” asked Kizzy.

“Gone to look for Hackbit,” replied her uncle.





CHAPTER X.

HOW JOSHUA RIMMON HONOURED HIS MOTHER.



HE way led down a dull street, hedged on either side by small houses, all detached as if in an independent spirit. A slight snow had fallen, but it was already quite black, as everything was in that district owing to the abundance of coal-pits and iron-foundries. As Kizzy and her uncle passed along they met companies of colliers, who were cleaned up and "playing," which term in the coal districts is applied to a chance holiday, from illness or otherwise. Some of these men nodded, a peculiar side nod, met with nowhere except in the Black Country. David returned these salutations with quiet courtesy. His brother would

have shaken hands with them, and yet made them feel his superiority. David was rarely familiar in his manner to any one, yet somehow he always managed to leave a pleasant impression. His whole attitude and expression seemed to show that he held himself above no man. Perhaps it was this demeanour which made him so successful a master, for he was unsurpassable in the management of his factory hands. But Kizzy knew nothing of all this; she had scarcely seen this uncle, and knew him only by her father's report. She now began to judge for herself.

The street was a long, straggling one, and led to a more crowded district, built upon part of a large common, which was studded here and there with huge black mounds, ruined engine-houses, and worked-out coalpits, some few of which were bricked over. Many of the houses had bands of iron round them; some rows of houses were banded together; all leaned in one direction or another, and the walls bulged.

It was in a cottage which stood alone in this locality, itself banded with iron, and having on one

side great wooden supports, that Joshua Rimmon had placed his mother. Kizzy knew the house well. She always passed it on her way to the town, which lay beyond the common land, about half a mile distant. This common land was known as the Old Park, and was undermined by a complete network of "cruttings," or underground roads, which extend frequently for miles.

"Is this the place he's put her in? Is this what I pay twenty-five pounds a-year rent for?"

"Do you pay the rent, uncle?"

He made no reply; but waited while Kizzy opened the door.

"Nobody ought to live here; look how it's sunk," he said.

The inside of the house was as little inviting as the outside. We will not go into detail; but one thing deserves mention. It was after they had looked at the wretchedly small and ill-furnished rooms downstairs, and had gone into the grandmother's bedroom, that David Rimmon's eyes became riveted on an old wooden box. His chest heaved, and turning to his niece he said, his honest eyes full of tears—

“ Oh, Kizzy, Kizzy, that’s the box poor mother went to service with when she was a girl. I remember her telling me she would never part with it. Poor, poor mother, to think of her coming to this, after her hard-working life, and when she has sons who can afford to keep her properly.”

“ It’s not your fault, uncle,” said Kizzy, whose lips were quivering. “ You have left Jumley many a year, and father has deceived us all.”

“ He told me,” went on David, after a little pause, “ that mother was queer in her head, and would have her own way. I ought to have come and seen for myself.”

“ Father’s miserly ; that’s at the bottom of it all, uncle. Oh, it is dreadful.”

These two scarcely spoke to each other all the way home, but they felt in a sense united to fight against all this wrong-doing.

Mrs. Rimmon had just woke up from a nap as they entered, and David went up to her and took her withered hand, and said, “ Mother, I was always a cowardly sort of a fellow at bottom. It was always my way as a lad to avoid a difficulty or a row.

That is why I believed what Joshua told me, instead of coming to you to know if it were true. Oh, mother, can you forgive me?"

With an almost supernatural effort, she flung her withered arms around him. "I forgive thee, Dave! I've nowt to forgive thee."

"Oh, yes, you have, mother," he said, breaking down utterly, till the tears fell thick and fast from his eyes on to her wrinkled cheek. "But oh! mother, I will try to make amends. I shall take you home with me, mother."

"But Joshua!" said the mother, her face losing its momentary expression of joy. At the thought of him, her mind began to wander once more, and the old theme of the workhouse came up.

"Look here, mother," said her son. "No workhouse can be a quarter so bad as the house you are living in."

"You haven't been in it, have you?" she said in a terrified manner. "Joshua said no one was to go in. It hasn't always been so bad as it is now," she hastened to explain. "But Joshua told me he's had such heavy losses."

Her son groaned. "If he has had losses," he said bitterly, "he will be all the more pleased that I should take charge of you altogether."

"Do take me with you," pleaded the old lady. "I wouldn't cost you much, indeed I wouldn't. I don't eat much, and I shall never want any new clothes; and it won't be for long," and the tears were trickling down her furrowed cheeks.

"Don't, mother, I can't bear it," David sobbed. "Don't say any more. You shall leave with me this very night." And he hastened away from her to make instant preparation.





CHAPTER XI.

A NEW YEAR'S LOSS.

THE terrible news about Rupert Edmon-
ton came to the Berediths, first
through the baker's boy, and Mrs.
Beredith absolutely refused to believe
it; but she was not long left in doubt, for a mes-
senger brought a letter from Rupert himself, telling
of his calamity, and begging her to break it herself
to Kizzy; he was too crushed to write to her himself
as he should. "I have been before the magistrates,
and have to go to Bow Street, London, to take my
trial there. There is the account of all this in my
desk for Kizzy; would to God I had sent it her
earlier!"

The lines seemed to have been written under

great agitation. They were much blurred. Mrs. Beredith at once started to see Rupert if possible. She was granted an interview.

She could scarcely believe her eyes when she saw Rupert, he was so changed. He was haggard and hollow-eyed.

"You are very good to come to me," he said. "There is no one else who could come."

Poor Mrs. Beredith could only weep, and protest that she believed him innocent, and offer him any money at her disposal, if that could help him.

"I have money at my own command," he answered her, "but I shall conduct my own case. Lawyers sometimes lose a man who is innocent. They are better suited to get off the guilty."

The interview was necessarily short. Just before Mrs. Beredith left him, Rupert implored her to go to Jumley and see Kizzy. She promised to do this, and quitted him with great reluctance. When she got home she was seized with a hysteric attack, and Lucy became frightened; for there was no Dr. Edmonton to call in. Thus it was not until New Year's Day that Mrs. Beredith arrived at Jumley to

fulfil her promise. When the door of Mr. Rimmon's house was opened to her by Sarah, and she asked for Miss Rimmon, Sarah burst into tears.

"Oh, ma'am," she cried, "she's gone right away; she had bad news last night. Nobody can find her."

Mrs. Beredith stood bewildered. "Oh, that I had come before!" she said. "Let me see Mrs. Rimmon," she said at last.

Sarah led the way to the dining-room. "The missis, she's upstairs," said Sarah, "but I will tell her. Oh, this is a wretched house, ma'am. There's the master's sister, she's been up here and stayed all night; and Mr. David, he's took old Mrs. Rimmon off to Manchester, and he and the master's had words; and, oh, what a house this is!" And she went out to call her mistress.

As she got to the staircase, she saw Miss Dorcas craning over the banisters. "Who's come, Sarah?" she demanded, hurling the words at the girl like the report of a gun.

"No one for you, miss," replied Sarah, pertly, trying to pass her.

“Tell me who it is directly,” said the spinster, blocking up the way.

The girl stood resolute, her lips pressed together.

“You shall not pass up these stairs till you’ve told me,” said Miss Dorcas.

Sarah appeared able to bear no more. Her Black Country fierceness came to the fore, and taking Miss Dorcas by the wrist with her strong, sinewy hand, she said, “If you don’t make way, I’ll throw you over the banisters.”

“You shall suffer for this, girl,” said Miss Dorcas, making way though. “Only wait till my brother comes home.”

The girl gave a laugh of derision.

A few minutes afterwards, a stooping, broken-down figure entered the dining-room. It was Mrs. Rimmon. Mrs. Beredith met her with a look of womanly sympathy.

“My pretty darling’s gone,” wailed Mrs. Rimmon. “She’s been missing all night. She must have wandered off frenzied. Oh, my poor Kizzy! and all the mines as there is uncovered!” and she shuddered, and pressed her hands against her head.

Mrs. Beredith said nothing. What could she say? There seemed nothing for her to do but to take her leave.

As she opened the door to do so, she surprised a figure jumping away from it, with copper-coloured hair and a red and freckled face. "How dare you listen at doors!" she exclaimed. "I will tell your mistress."

This was a second shock for Miss Dorcas. Sarah had insulted her, and a visitor had taken her for a servant, and had caught her listening.

Sarah had heard this, and wore a very satisfied look as she came to open the front door for Mrs. Beredith. That lady put half-a-crown into her hand, and said, "Can you write, my girl?"

"Yes, mum," replied Sarah, proudly.

"Then write to me and let me know all the news you can about Miss Rimmon. You know my address, of course. I must go back, or my daughter will be frightened. I suppose competent persons are making a search?"

"Oh, yes, mum, master's got ever so many looking for her."

Nobody had thought of communicating with Jubal except Sarah ; and she strongly advised him to stay at the Saltrings' till the end of the holidays, if they would have him.

All through that day, and the next night, and for many days and nights, an unavailing search for Keziah went on.

In this search Mr. Rimmon displayed very real zeal. That she should be speedily restored to her home was most important to him ; and, incongruous as it may seem, he really had some affection for his daughter, though this had not prevented his being ready to sacrifice her to his own interests. His plans appeared to be frustrated. Kizzy was sacrificed, and he was not the gainer but the loser by the transaction. He and his nephew, Thomas Hackbit, had driven her forth, and it was no comfort to Mr. Rimmon that no one would know this.

On New Year's Eve Mr. Rimmon, with his own hand, had given Keziah a forged letter purporting to have come from Rupert, and containing a confession of the murder.

The two plotters had imagined that this letter would turn her heart from her old lover completely and for ever. They had rightly calculated that without this she would have implicitly believed her lover innocent, and would have stuck to him all the more for the calamity which had befallen him.

The poor girl must have left the house almost immediately after receiving the letter, when they believed her to be gone to her room. It was not until the following morning that it was discovered she was missing.

It was a terrible thing for Mr. Rimmon to have to set the police to look for his daughter; but what could he do? She must be found, or his crime against her would go for nothing. But as the days passed, with no success, his state of mind was wretched. Hackbit kept away from drink for the most part, now suggesting plans, and now swearing at his uncle for having brought matters to such a pass.



CHAPTER XII.

THE EXPLOSION.



VER a week had passed, and Mr. Hackbit observed this fact to Mr. Rimmon in his dining-room, seated upon the table, his hat upon his head wrong way before, his hands thrust deep into his pockets, his eyes terribly blood-shot. He next gave it as his opinion that Kizzy had fallen into one of those worked-out mines, and expressed his intention, should this turn out to be the case, of throwing his uncle's body after her. Then recollecting that he had during the week exhausted all possible epithets upon Mr. Rimmon, he began to rain abuse on the colliery proprietors of the neighbourhood. "It's disgraceful," he said, "the way

they leave these pits, without so much as a fence around them, let alone bricking them over; though the place is swarming with children. It gives me the horrors to walk across the Old Park on a dark night; I always expect the next step to lead me into one of these infernal holes. And they go and undermine the whole district, and then move farther off, and let the land for building purposes, though the houses sink and fall, and they know it."

"Well, I'm not a colliery proprietor," replied his uncle.

"If you're not, you buy the land," retorted his nephew, "and build cottages on it."

"Well," said Mr. Rimmon savagely, "it's right enough on population grounds. The neighbourhood's overcrowded enough; it's better for those who are left, if a house falls and kills a few, I suppose."

"Very fine philosophy," responded his nephew with a sneer. "But nature will carry off your mother soon enough, at all events, without your putting her in one of those cursed houses." Then returning to his abuse of the colliery proprietors, he

said, "They always put off repairing their machinery, too, and never buy a new rope till the old one has broken and dropped a cage full of human beings down the pit. But I suppose you'll say that's right on population grounds."

"The men are as careless as the masters," rejoined Mr. Rimmon, bristling. "They continually light their pipes at their lamps, though they know an explosion may follow."

The time when this conversation was being held was about three in the afternoon. The two had been out all the morning, and were now waiting for Sarah to bring them some refreshment. The clouds came over very heavy, and a thick fog came on. They were compelled to light the gas. Just then Sarah entered with a tray of refreshments, and as she stood in the doorway a sound like the crash of a hundred thunders rang through the air. Sarah let her tray fall, crying at the same time, "It's an explosion;" and precipitately fled.

The two thus left together with the wreck of their lunch gazed at each other with elevated eyebrows. Neither spoke for a moment, till Mr.

Hackbit removed his hat slowly, scratched his head deliberately, and curtly ejaculated, "The devil!"

This opened his companion's lips, who said, "You may depend it's an explosion at Troworth mine, for Hedgely refused to have the patent lamps there. We'd better go."

"How many do you suppose were in the mine at this time?" asked Hackbit.

"Three or four hundred."

"Look here," said the lawyer, "if Kizzy is anywhere in the neighbourhood, this will bring her out; for never a man is burnt in the pits but she goes to see if she can do anything."

While they talked, an endless tramp was heard in the road outside, and loud wailing.

Troworth Hill coal-mines are situated on the opposite side of the town of Jumley to that on which Mr. Rimmon lived; and Hackbit and his uncle followed the direction of the tramping feet across the Old Park, through the disreputable, dirty little crowded town, which had nearly always its pestilence as the summer came round, as it had always its pestilence, summer and winter, of vice and profanity.

Neither Mr. Rimmon nor Mr. Hackbit could be said to notice these facts much, as they had both been brought up in the neighbourhood ; and what we are accustomed to does not shock us.

The shops in the town appeared deserted, and the blackened snow bore the marks of multitudes of feet.

Before they reached the spot, they saw lights moving, and their throats were filled with smoke and sulphury vapour. At last they got close to the wailing crowd, consisting chiefly of women whose husbands were in the mine—too often their sons also. Prayers and oaths mingled strangely in their conversation, which was disjointed, and chiefly at the screaming pitch. Clouds of hot smoke were vomited from the pit's mouth. Hackbit and Rimmon forced their way through the women to get near a group of gentlemen who were close to the pit's mouth. They were the proprietors, together with the engineer.

“Can you account for this, Mr. Murdock?” asked Mr. Rimmon of the nearest of these gentlemen.

“It's the lamps, I expect,” he replied. “We should have had the Davys in a few days.”

“Had any of the men come up before this occurred?” continued Mr. Rimmon.

“Every soul is down that went down this morning.”

“How long do you think it will be before any one can venture down the pit?”

“It would be death to any one who went down yet.”

This conversation was extremely difficult to carry on, owing to the shrieks of the women, who called incessantly, “Can’t you do anythink to save ’em?” “Isn’t there a man among you?”

Mr. Murdock tried to speak to them, but they hissed at him as the author of their misery, and demanded their husbands and sons and fathers at his hands, with threats and entreaties. One woman, frenzied, tried to throw herself down the pit, and was dragged back by main force.

“Ah!” shrieked a woman’s voice above all the rest, “I knew there’d be this to-day; for didn’t my poor master’s dog come home to me at seven this morning, him as has always been for years down the pit with him.”

Murdock was again asked when some one would be sent down the pit to the rescue. He replied calmly that he himself would go as soon as he could, but at present it would be sheer madness to attempt it.

Hour after hour the crowd watched, refusing to stir. Rinmon and Hackbit had been away for some time, and had returned again. About ten o'clock smoke was still issuing from the mouth of the pit, and the clamour for relatives was still going on. Murdock with his companions continued in consultation.

It was Hackbit who addressed him this time. "Do you think an effort can be made now?" he asked, in a voice quite sober. "I shall go down with the first cage."

A cry of "brave man" was heard in a woman's voice, clear and silvery. It sounded like a musical bell amid all that tumult. Hackbit's eyes wandered round the torchlit crowd and rested on the white face of Keziah, who was holding an infant in her arms. It was true, then; the anguish of others had drawn her forth.

Mr. Rimmon was looking for the owner of the voice, too, but had not caught sight of her, for she had hidden herself immediately. Hackbit's quick eye had followed her, however, and he dashed after her at once.

"Oh, cousin," he exclaimed, in a reproachful tone, "why have you made us all so miserable?"

The girl hung her head. "I only went to hide my own misery," she said gently. "I didn't think anybody cared."

"I care very much," responded Hackbit. "Believe me, cousin, I feel more for you than words can express. I will do anything, suffer anything to bring back happiness to you;" and the hypocrite received a grateful look from the lovely eyes, that had grown so pathetic since he last beheld them, and looked larger and darker for the dark circles that now surrounded them. How pinched her little face had grown! Even Hackbit's heart was stirred as he looked at her.

"Whose baby have you got?" he asked.

"It belongs to that poor woman down there," replied Kizzy, indicating with her finger. "She

fainted, and the baby fell from her arms, and nobody offered to pick it up. It would have been trampled to death."

"Is there nobody the child can be given up to?" asked Hackbit.

"I don't know."

"Perhaps the mother will come to," suggested Hackbit.

Mr. Rimmon was seeking his nephew in the crowd, and at last perceived him, and with a mortified shock, for mortified it was, he recognised his daughter, and went up to her.

She was safe then ; and what a scandal it all was, her disappearance, and her turning up like this, more like a ghost than a living girl ! Still, there was a spark of tenderness in his voice as he said, "Kizzy, my child !" And truly he was alarmed enough when he saw the change that had come over her in little more than a week. The round plump face had grown so pointed and meagre, the lips were pale and drawn, and the dark eyes stared out from their hollow depths, with a dull look of misery in them.

"Come home with thy father, child," said Mr.

Rimmon, heartily ashamed of his work, though never thinking of undeceiving his daughter.

“Let us look for the child’s mother,” said Hackbit, and the three moved with difficulty towards a spot where the crowd was not quite so thick, except in the centre of it where there existed a kind of nucleus closely set round one object of interest. It was the figure of a young girl, who could scarcely be twenty from her looks. One of the numerous doctors upon the spot was examining her as Hackbit drew near, and he very soon remarked that her trouble was over at any rate; she was dead.

“Has this poor girl no relatives, no one who would take charge of the baby?” asked Mr. Rimmon of the bystanders.

“She has neither kith nor kin, neither has her poor master, who lies burnt to a cinder, worse luck, at the bottom of the mine.”

“Come home with me, Kizzy,” said Mr. Rimmon again. “I will try and be kind to you;” and he made no objection to her carrying the baby with her.

As they passed through Jumley town, the

numerous low public-houses blazed out upon the darkness, and were dealing out their liquors to distracted women who had come to drown their grief; vile traps, catching the miserable, and heaping anguish upon them under the guise of comfort.

The lurid glow of the furnaces lit their path for a while with an unnatural light, making the darkness of the Old Park, to be traversed afterwards, doubly dark. Hackbit at all times disliking this place, disliked it excessively to-night, and thought grimly of the uncovered pits. This did not prevent his offering to carry the baby, but Kizzy would not give it up. It was asleep and warm under her cloak. To his uncle he said in a low tone, "Above all, cross her in nothing," unnecessary advice, however, for Mr. Rimmon was not disposed to cross her.

At the end of the Old Park, Hackbit left his uncle and cousin, and retraced his steps. He was soon again in the place of his antipathy, and carefully noted each step he took. He had got about half-way across, when a rumbling sound, followed by a crash, startled him. It was one of the threatened

houses giving way. No doubt the tenants were up at the mine.

As Hackbit passed through the town, he was much tempted to enter one of the public-houses, but he resisted the temptation. "Hang it all," he thought, "let me go into the jaws of death sober."

When he reached the pit's mouth, a cage was waiting to be lowered. "Wait for me," he cried. Murdock was in the cage. "Don't you go, for God's sake," Hackbit said. "You are needed to right the wrongs."

There is nothing extraordinary in this bravery on the part of Hackbit. No Black Country man is a coward. All are alike ready in these emergencies. There is never a cry for volunteers.

There was a lull in the crowd as the cage was lowered and those few brave men descended to rescue some few, if possible, of the hundreds shut up in that fiery prison.

A white-chokered young gentleman of some three-and-twenty years, with a very wide-brimmed clerical hat, ventured to make a remark to some

women in his neighbourhood, about submitting themselves to the will of Providence.

“Shut thy —— mouth,” cried one of the women, “or we’ll chuck thee down th’ pit.”

They looked so much like carrying out the threat that the curate moved away, as fast as he could with any dignity. Some jeers were thrown after him, and one of the women said, “It’s always the same gate. We mun be patient, when wages is so low as we havener enow to eat. If our children die of th’ fever, or our lads i’ th’ explosion, it’s the visitation of God. Oh, it’s the plague o’ parsons is the worst plague the Lord ever sent us, curse them.”

These words fell on the ear of an elderly clergyman, who was standing by hoping to be of use to somebody; and he said to the woman who had spoken, very gently, and with no bitterness—

“We clergy are great blunderers, I fear; but believe me, we would do better if we knew how. Indeed my heart bleeds for you to-night.”

“Ah! if all th’ parsons was like you, we wouldner curse them,” replied the woman.

There seemed to be something happening at the pit's mouth now. The crowd moved as near as it dared to the circle of doctors. The signal had been given to draw up the cage. The crowd yelled like demons as the machinery was set in motion, and the rope flew over the pulley. "Stand back," cried the police. The mouth of the pit was filled by an object rising. It was the cage. The torches revealed Hackbit and another, each with a black burden in his arms. The charred masses they carried were human beings. Blankets were held by the four corners in readiness, and the poor wretches were placed in them and carried to the waggons.

The crowd had almost to be beaten back now, it surged so powerfully towards the bodies, in order, if possible, to recognise them; but they were unrecognisable.

"The fire's still burning in the north crutting," said Hackbit. "We daren't go near there."

The signal was given to lower, and down went those brave men again.

After the fourth descent they were so exhausted that new volunteers came forward.

In the course of the night, some thirty bodies, six of which were just alive, were brought up. The rest were nothing but cinders.





CHAPTER XIII.

AT HOME AGAIN.



IN the meantime, Kizzy and her father and the little orphan baby had reached the dismal house.

The door was opened by Mrs. Rimmon herself. She uttered a loud cry on seeing her daughter. She woke the baby and it began to wail piteously.

Mrs. Rimmon was not at all surprised to see the baby. She was accustomed to her daughter's taking to all kinds of waifs and strays. It was Kizzy she was surprised to see.

When Kizzy had been placed in her father's chair, she smiled faintly, and asked that the baby might be fed. Mrs. Rimmon busied herself in

taking off her daughter's shoes and stockings ; they were soaking wet. She then proceeded to put the little white feet into a hot bath, and Sarah, having fed the baby and placed it in an improvised bassinette, brought some tea for her young mistress in an incredibly short time.

Kizzy tried to raise her head from the chair, but she could not ; so Sarah raised her, and gave her the tea. A kind of fog gathered on the girl's mind, and she seemed to be in a different place, with different people ; yet she frequently recurred to the baby, and asked piteously that it might be looked after.

"It's fast asleep like a little angel," said Sarah, "in a clothes basket by the kitchen-fire."

Kizzy closed her eyes on hearing this, and remained white and motionless.

"Don't you think we had better send for the doctor?" suggested Mrs. Rimmon in a frightened whisper.

"We could get no doctor if we sent," replied her husband. "You know they are all busy at the pit. Hadn't I better carry her up to bed?"

While they were debating this question, there was a sound of wheels. They stopped opposite the house, and there was a ring at the door. Sarah hurried to it, in no good humour; she was afraid the baby might wake. Standing before her at the door, whom should she see but Mr. Saltring, with a red muffler at his neck, rivalling his red whiskers; and behind him crept Jubal.

“Good heart alive, girl,” said Mr. Saltring to Sarah, who stood still, not offering to ask him in, “you are Sarah, aren’t you? You addressed your letter all wrong, and it has only come to us to-night.”

“Oh, come in, sir,” said Sarah, who had now recovered herself; “she’s come back to-night, sir, and she looks awful.”

Mr. Saltring presented himself without ceremony before Mr. Rimmon, whose breath was nearly taken away by the sudden appearance. These gentlemen had never met before, though they knew each other by reputation.

“We’ve posted all the way,” said Mr. Saltring. “We only heard to-night of your misfortune.”

"It was very good of you," responded Mr. Rimmon coldly.

"You see," said Mr. Saltring, a little quenched by this frigidity, "the poor boy couldn't rest, so I brought him."

Jubal had kept carefully in the shadow of Mr. Saltring all this time, but at these words he ventured to make himself visible. He instantly caught sight of the deathly face of his sister, and cried, "Oh, Mr. Saltring, do look at Kizzy."

Mr. Saltring stepped from behind the door, which had hitherto hidden Keziah from him. "Good heart alive, man," he exclaimed, addressing Mr. Rimmon. "Lord have mercy on us all for a pack of fools!"

While Mr. Rimmon was searching in his brains for the meaning of this remark, Mr. Saltring had unbuttoned his ponderous overcoat and taken out a flask of brandy, and was applying it to Keziah's lips.

"On my soul, I never saw such a lovely creature in my life," he exclaimed.

"My daughter's a teetotaller," gasped Mr. Rimmon.

“Rubbish !” said Mr. Saltring, continuing to give the brandy.

The girl’s eyes opened, and Mr. Saltring said, in a coaxing tone, “There, there ; that’s better, pretty dear.” Her velvet eyes fastened on him for a moment, and a faint smile flickered on her face and went out.

Mr. Saltring was thinking, “How is it possible such a girl can ever have been born in Jumley ?”

Jubal was standing near quite boldly now. He did not feel so much afraid when Mr. Saltring was in the house.

Kizzy moved a little. Mr. Saltring got up from his kneeling position, pushed the table out of the way, and hoisted the great sofa towards the fire.

Mr. Rimmon’s face was stony as he watched this proceeding.

“Now, if we had some pillows and blankets,” suggested Mr. Saltring to Mrs. Rimmon ; and while she went to fetch them, he emptied the coal-box on the fire.

Kizzy was speedily made comfortable on the sofa.

It must have been nearly two o'clock in the morning; but this was not the only household up in Jumley. No one went to bed in explosion times, even of those not concerned; and, as a proof of this, the door next opened to admit the head of Miss Dorcas Rimmon, who, having heard that Kizzy had been found, had come up to verify the fact.

"Oh!" she observed in a spiteful tone, "I didn't know there was company;" and she was about to bounce back again, when Mr. Saltring said—

"My name is Samuel Saltring; you may have heard of me. You must be a Rimmon from the family likeness."

"Yes, I am Miss Rimmon," that lady acknowledged; and she looked over the back of the sofa. "So she's come back, is she, the ungrateful little wretch?"

Mr. Rimmon touched his sister gently with his foot, to warn her to be silent.

"No, Joshua, I won't be quiet," said Miss Dorcas defiantly. "You've no need to kick me. I shall say what I like."

"Then I would say it in a quieter tone if I were

you, considering all things," put in Mr. Saltring.

"It's nothing to do with you," rejoined Miss Dorcas, narrowing her eyes as she looked at him.

"I'll give you a bit of advice," retorted the bluff wine-merchant: "if you'd keep better tempered you'd be better looking."

"Please remember you are not in your own house," Mr. Rimmon remarked to Mr. Saltring.

"Now, look here," said the honest fellow, kindness shining in his face; "you don't want to be told I mean well. Let us be agreeable. Think of the dear child lying there."

Miss Dorcas tossed her head.

"You will let me stay and help you nurse her to-night," said Mr. Saltring to Mrs. Rimmon. "I know a lot about nursing sick folk."

The next to appear on the scene was Thomas Hackbit, who had by this time refreshed himself at one of the low inns still open. He tried hard to look sober, but his head nodded in a ghastly manner, and he hiccupped between every word he tried to speak. He at once recognised Saltring as a friend, though he had never set eyes on him before.

“Glad to shee you, old chap,” he said.

“Get away out of the house, you disgusting brute,” exclaimed Miss Dorcas, as Hackbit, smiling inanely, advanced towards Mr. Saltring.

“Take no notish of her,” remarked Hackbit confidentially in Saltring’s ear. “She ’sh cat. Deucedly ugly, isn’t she? Oh, Lord, she ’s millinersh dressmakersh.”

Mr. Rimmon tried to explain that Mr. Hackbit was a little unsteady, owing to his having been down a coal-mine rescuing burning men.

“He ’s been somewhere else since, I should think,” observed Mr. Saltring, smiling in spite of himself.

At the sound of Mr. Rimmon’s voice, Hackbit began again—

“He ’sh an old fool, too. He drove Keziah away, forged lettersh, made her b’lieve ——”

“For God’s sake, hush,” burst forth Mr. Rimmon.

“Now he ’sh shwearing,” said Hackbit, smiling benignly. “He ’sh good man, he ish; prayer meetingsh, Bible-classesh. He getsh drunk, and shplits things, he doesh.”

Dorcas here gave him a friendly poke.

“What are you doing?” he began, turning on her. “You’ve left your ’prentish out waiting for you. I metsh her. I kished her.”

This was too much for Miss Dorcas, who explained that she had brought Miss Timmins up with her for company, and had not thought it worth while to ask her in, as she was only come for a minute.

“Leave her there bitsh longer,” said Hackbit, cocking his hat on the back of his head. “You go home yourshelf. Nobody wantsh kish you.”

Mr. Hackbit next announced his intention of spending the remainder of the night at his uncle’s, and had of necessity to be accommodated.

But none of these episodes disturbed Kizzy, who was in a sound sleep.

The slow winter morning broke, and stole feebly over the objects in the room where Kizzy lay, the deep silky fringes of her eyes resting on the pallid cheeks. The weary mother had fallen asleep, too; and Mr. Saltring sat near the couch, with his head drooping on his chest till his bald head, rather than his face, looked towards Kizzy; but he was not

asleep. When at last Sarah made her appearance, Kizzy opened her eyes with a frightened look, and sighed deeply. Mr. Saltring was beside her in a moment. "Come, we are better," he said cheerfully. "Four hours' sleep at a stretch. Now, Sarah, my lass, an egg beaten up in milk, please." He gave it to the girl with all the gentleness of a woman, and all the tact, and was rewarded by a pathetic smile. This over, he asked Sarah if he might have a wash. She looked somewhat uneasy.

"Well, sir," she said, "Mr. Hackbit have got the spare room, and Master Jubal, he wouldn't sleep with his father, and Miss Dorcas wouldn't go home neither, after what Mr. Hackbit said, and she and Miss Timmins are in Miss Kizzy's room——"

"Oh, all right," said Mr. Saltring, "I'll go into Jubal's room;" but when he tried the door he found it locked, and after knocking several times and receiving no answer, he concluded that he would go to the room Hackbit occupied, and not disturb the poor lad. "I needn't wake Mr. Hackbit," he said.

The door proved not to be locked; and, softly

entering, he beheld Hackbit in a profound sleep, with his arms thrown over the back of his head. He had evidently felt cold, for he had taken down the bed-curtains and put them across the bed ; also the hearth-rug. Mr. Saltring could scarcely help laughing. Hackbit's own garments—that is, some of them—lay on the floor, close to the door. His boots, however, could be seen nowhere at first. On looking more closely, they were discovered poking out at the foot of the bed, on the owner's feet.

Mr. Saltring poured out some water very quietly, but he disturbed the sleeper nevertheless, and a faint voice from the bed said, “What's that?”

Mr. Saltring made an apology for his intrusion.

“Don't mention it,” said Hackbit, holding his head tightly between his hands ; “but I haven't the pleasure of knowing you, have I?”

“No,” replied Mr. Saltring ; and he then explained himself.

“I'm afraid I must have been drunk last night,” said Hackbit. “She didn't see me, did she?—Kizzy, I mean.”

“She was too ill.”

“Thank Heaven for that, at any rate. I’m a fool to drink. Nobody knows it better than I do. I should leave it off if I’d a wife and a comfortable home.”

“My dear sir,” rejoined Mr. Saltring impressively, “a man should conquer his faults before his marriage, and not subject a good woman to the chance of his experiment failing afterwards.”

“Yes, you are right. But it’s very hard to give up one’s only comfort, and nothing to replace it.”

“Don’t be in bondage. Make up your mind never to taste another drop.” And now, having completed his toilet, Mr. Saltring hastened down to his patient.

Mr. Rimmon had come down by this time. Kizzy was looking round for Mr. Saltring, and gladdened at his approach. “She’s looking better, isn’t she?” he observed to Mr. Rimmon. “A change of air would be the very thing for her. Let me take her to Langton with me to-day, and we will return her to you in perfect health, God permitting.”

Mr. Rimmon found it desirable to accept this offer for many reasons. He was very glad when he

discovered that Mr. Saltring wished Jubal to go back with him, too. As for Kizzy herself, her apathy was too great for her to express a choice at all. They might do what they liked with her, she said, so long as the baby was looked after.

“The baby shall go too,” said Mr. Saltring. “There are nurses enough at our house, I guess; and if anybody lays claim to it, they can easily have it.”

When they had all started in the phaeton, Sarah wrote and informed Mrs. Beredith of what had occurred. She could not say where Kizzy had been, however, during her absence, as she had preserved a strict silence on that point, and Mr. Saltring would not have her questioned.





CHAPTER XIV.

MAUD HARWYN.



MAUD HARWYN, though a young lady of considerable personal attractions, and therefore especially exposed to criticism, inhabited a house on her own responsibility at Bowdon, near Manchester. She was an orphan, and lived with only two female servants, except when her brother Gerald was at home from Birmingham. Many of her friends thought this highly improper; but it was one of Maud's characteristics not to bow to Mrs. Grundy. Her schoolmaster-brother did not disapprove of her, however; and her father must have trusted her, for he placed her under no guardian, though he left her a large fortune. The

reader has already seen that Lawyer Layton and his wife were strong adherents of Miss Harwyn. They had, nevertheless, urged upon her the desirability of engaging an elderly companion to live with her; but she was not open to reason.

About a week after the events recorded in the last chapter, she was seated, sipping her tea, in a perfect bower of a sitting-room, quite alone, with an air of complacency and thorough independence that men would scarcely give solitary women credit for. She was looking caressingly upon her pretty feet, placed upon the fender. They were cased in slippers of the gayest and daintiest. She made no secret of the fact that it was of grave importance to her to be well-dressed. She wished to be beautiful, and she thought it was for herself alone that she wished it.

Her house, planned by herself, was like no other. One could not see it without thoughts of harmony and sunshine and warm summer days. This girl was an artist, though a certain indolence born of wealth had kept her talent in the dark. Her house, as much as the pictures in her studio, spoke of this. Her studio opened into the dining-room on one side,

and the drawing-room on the other. The studio was also a music-room, and in addition to a piano, contained a harp, a violin, and a guitar. On two or three easels stood unfinished canvases. The room itself was panelled, and every panel contained a painting, Maud's own work. Near a low couch was a circular bookcase on wheels, of her own designing. By the easiest motion it would turn round when she wished to change a volume.

This was essentially a gay room, but as a contrast, her dining-room was grim and sombre. She had travelled all over Europe in search of weird pictures for this room; and every evening when she dined alone there she had the apartment lit by wax candles enough to have illuminated a ball-room.

While she was drinking her tea on the afternoon referred to, Maud's housemaid brought to her a message from the next villa, The Chestnuts. Miss Harwyn was begged to come in there, as an old lady was seriously ill, and the gentleman did not like to leave her without somebody besides his servants, while he rode to Manchester to fetch a doctor.

Maud went without a moment's hesitation, and a

neat servant showed her to the old lady's room. The house was smaller than Maud's and differed from it in every way, and it had an old-fashioned air and a certain stiffness and dulness about it. The bedroom she was shown into was hot and rather stifling. Maud at once glanced towards the four-post bedstead with its white hangings. Rolling restlessly upon the pillow lay an aged head.

Maud said to the servant, "Haven't you another spare room with a bed without hangings in it?"

No: there were hangings just like this in all the rooms.

Maud placed a screen beside the bed, and opened a window, and the fresh air revived the old lady a little; and she said feebly—

"I don't think this is the house."

"Oh, yes, it is," said Maud gently; "you are all right."

"I knew I should come to it," was the old lady's reply.

"Why, of course," said Maud, not in the least understanding.

The old lady glanced towards the foot of the

bed and observing a large fire, said in alarm, "Take some of the coal off, my dear ; your father will be so angry."

Maud now became certain the old lady was wandering, and determined to pacify her to the utmost, so actually removed a little of the coal ; and the old lady rambled on.

"Jubal's a big boy. He'll disagree with his father soon."

"How odd !" thought Maud. "I really believed there was but one Jubal in the world, and now here's another ;" and her mind went back to Langton, and to her brother's pupil who was visiting at the Saltrings'. She began to bathe the old lady's head with eau de Cologne which she had thoughtfully put in her pocket. The old lady went to sleep under the influence of this, and Maud sat down to wait for the unknown master of the house to relieve her vigil. She knew him by sight, but was unacquainted with his name.

It was late before he returned. On entering the bedroom he gravely held out his hand to his neighbour, and began to thank her for her great kindness.

“Oh, don’t thank me, I have done nothing,” she said, with a frank smile. Then she added, “But I don’t know your name.”

“My name is David Rimmon.”

“Then, Mr. Rimmon, can I be of any further use to you?”

“I have troubled you too much already,” said David. “The room is scented like a bower; I am sure that is your doing. But, if I might ask you one thing more, would you wait till the doctor has seen mother? You would understand his directions better than I could, and explain them to my house-keeper.”

“But would she like my interfering?” said Maud with some hesitation.

“Well,” replied David nervously, “she’s rather deaf, and has a way of pretending to hear when she doesn’t, to hide it. And I think you would make her understand.”

Maud consented at once, and David went downstairs to bring up the doctor.

That gentleman meanwhile had been growing very impatient. He had examined minutely every

print in the room, and had fallen out with the roses on the wall-paper, had sat down on each chair in succession, to try their relative comfort, and had finally stationed himself with his back to the fire, his eye fixed on the staircase, visible through the open door, his ear turned slightly upwards, to catch any sound from above. Mr. Rimmon had kept him longer than he had intended, having been very slow in the delivery of his remarks to Maud ; and after leaving her, he had stood several moments on the dark landing, meditating.

The doctor did not meet him cordially. He had not even been appeased by a glass of wine. This had been entirely an oversight on Mr. Rimmon's part, but the doctor felt it nevertheless. He could only show it in one way. It was by increased gravity and severity of demeanour. He also waited for Mr. Rimmon to begin, which was always difficult for David. The two looked at each other in silence for some seconds, when the doctor, in his impatience, by the sudden raising of his boot, knocked the fire-irons down, causing a great noise. He turned very red at the accident, and solemnly replaced the fire-

irons; then, thoroughly out of temper, faced Mr. Rimmon, and observed frigidly—

“I can’t conceive why people put fire-irons on those eminences. Everybody is certain to knock them down.”

Mr. Rimmon meekly replied that they were awkward, and asked the doctor in a most conciliatory tone, if he would mind stepping upstairs.

“Mind?” rejoined the doctor irritably. “It’s my business, I suppose.”

Mr. Rimmon led the way, wondering what could be the cause of the doctor’s snappishness.

We are not going to represent Mrs. Rimmon as an interesting patient, nor that she excited strong sympathy in Maud Harwyn. This world’s sufferers are frequently uninteresting to a stranger; their aspect is often forbidding; and though their condition is compassionated, they can find sympathy for themselves, alas too often, only with God.

Miss Harwyn’s visit to David Rimmon was by no means her last; for as the days wore on, it became a constant thing for the neighbours to see her

entering his house ; and Maud was not better thought of in consequence. It was another strange proceeding of this very strange young lady ; and to be strange is quite reason enough for a girl's being placed outside the charmed circle of good and discreet society. Some writer has said that "one can only be strange by being wise and good ;" and Miss Harwyn's neighbours, to whom she was ministering, certainly did not think her strange, unless in this sense.

Mrs. Rimmon had recovered remarkably under her ministration, and had learned to listen impatiently for her visitor's footstep. She was soon able to sit up, and her chair was placed near the window, in view of the large garden, where, winter though it was, an air of cheerfulness reigned. It was a particularly good year for holly-berries, and the old lady's eyes were gladdened by the sight of them, and by the congregations of robins and sparrows feasting unmolested. Sometimes Mrs. Rimmon would sit silent for a long time together, looking out of this window ; but if Maud offered to go, she would become querulous at once.

One afternoon they were sitting together thus, when Mrs. Rimmon suddenly began comparing her present outlook with the Old Park at Jumley ; and though her account was such that Maud understood very little of it, she nevertheless listened patiently. Thus encouraged, this desolate creature opened her heart more and more : but Maud had a way of inviting confidence.

Even David had begun to talk freely with her. He had gone so far as to tell her something of his niece and her sad story, omitting mention of his brother, however, for on this point he was very sensitive. As a boy, his elder brother had been upright in all his dealings, severe always, yet not more so with others than with himself ; and David had grown up with a reverence for this brother, whom he felt to be beyond the comprehension of his feeble brain. And now that deep down and hidden away in his heart this idol lay broken, the fact was as far out of his consciousness as he could put it. It is to be questioned whether he had even thought this in words. Some lingering, vague comfort he stored up, as do thousands of other hearts in

like trouble—the vague and lingering hope that there might be some mistake, some extenuating circumstance not brought to light. And why deny these hearts their feeble and sad solace?

David had not seen Maud for more than a few minutes at a time, except on Saturday afternoons, when he returned early from business; yet these fleeting moments had in a short week grown inexpressibly dear to him. Maud, perceiving that he cared to talk to her, humoured his fancy, and gave him opportunities of seeing her, and brightened her own life by this kindness to another. If she could have foreseen the future, how she would have withheld this sweet cup from his lips!

Kizzy's story had been related to her in fragments, and at several different times; and Miss Harwyn, enthusiastic and compassionate, had told David that, when his mother should be well enough to spare her, she would go to her friends at Langton for a day or two and endeavour to make Kizzy's acquaintance. Her further intention was to bring the young lady to Bowdon to stay with her, if they got on well together.

In about a month from the time of Kizzy's going to the Saltrings', Maud set out for Langton, and her heart was singing: for she thought, here was a justifiable opportunity of once more meeting Tom Towers. She was also in high spirits at the prospect of finding a girl-friend, a luxury all her money had not brought her.

When the evening of the day of Maud's departure had come, and her bright face had never once penetrated the old-fashioned parlour of her neighbour's house, the heart of David Rimmon fell within him. The light of his life seemed to have died, and his spirit, slow always, was for once startled into a vivid life, and into the acknowledgment that this fair creature was more to him than anything else in the world. Although this truth had penetrated his consciousness, it still suggested no consequences. It was a single absorbing thought of adoration, unmingled with desire.





CHAPTER XV.

A STRANGE PROPOSAL.



KIZZY speedily became quite at home in her new surroundings ; and, though a trifle pale, she looked much like her old self. There was one striking difference, however. She never laughed. The Saltrings, however, not having known her until her trouble had come upon her, did not notice this. Her sorrow had seemed to heighten her beauty and etherealise it. There was only one person in this establishment who did not yield a willing devotion to this queen of beauty and of sweet manners. That was Laura. This young lady gave Kizzy many an unhappy moment, when no one else was by ; and Kizzy

accepted all this with a certain gentleness and forbearance which had been foreign to her before this trial.

The Towers had been unremitting in their attentions, and had had grave fears for the poor girl at first, and had seen her steady improvement with some surprise. She never spoke of her trouble, and no one referred to it, unless it might be Laura. Kizzy had made a resolve that, though she had been bitterly separated from her lover, it should not wreck her life. Although her sweet dream had been thus harshly dispelled, there still remained to her the happy past and the power of praying for him; and, above all, there rose up for her consolation the thought that in another world they might meet again, his crime washed away. The poor girl literally lived in this thought.

Her father had been to Langton to see her, and she had treated him with much gentle affection. If her heart made excuses for one man who had sinned, ought it not also to do the same for her father?

One other trouble had come upon Keziah. Mrs. Beredith was angry with her. She reproached her

for not making her house her home in her affliction. But this was not so much the cause of her anger. It was that Keziah evidently believed in Rupert's guilt. This lady, who could have staked her life on Kizzy's fidelity, now found her resigned to a separation and resolved to return no more to Leamington. Alas, poor Kizzy ! no one knew what a proof she had in her possession of her lover's guilt. Whether he got off or not, the fact remained the same.

Kizzy was thinking over all this one morning with a great deal of misgiving, when Miss Harwyn was announced. Mrs. Saltring strongly urged Kizzy to see her, as Miss Harwyn had expressed such an earnest desire to make her acquaintance.

Kizzy was upstairs, in a sitting-room devoted to her during her illness, and was engaged upon some work for Mrs. Saltring. She could never be anywhere without being helpful to those around her. As Mrs. Saltring held the door open for Miss Harwyn to pass in, Kizzy mentally contrasted the two—Mrs. Saltring, round, plump, and small, with house and baby stamped upon her face, though in a pleasing way ; Miss Harwyn, tall and majestic,

with an air of freedom in her whole attitude which seemed to belong to some wild bird sojourning a moment among men, with the consciousness that presently the grand wings can carry him far away to his native haunts. Kizzy did not think this in so many words, but the words describe the impression made on her mind.

The two girls shook hands frankly, and Maud seated herself near Keziah; and Mrs. Saltring, on the plea of some household duty, went away. She had more than once found Miss Harwyn a little too much for her. When the door had closed behind her, Maud, as if attracted by a magnet, passed her arm round Kizzy's slender waist, and gently kissed her, saying with a rich smile—

“Whom do you think I saw a few days ago?”

“I can have no idea,” responded Keziah wearily.

“It was your uncle David and your grand-mamma.”

“Where did you see them?”

“In their own house. They are my neighbours.”

“Oh, do tell me about them,” said Kizzy, a rich glow passing over her features.

“What a complexion!” thought Maud. “Who ever could paint it?” Then Maud, in the prettiest conceivable way, explained how they had become acquainted, and spoke nothing of her own kindness, but very much in praise of David’s kindheartedness. “And do you know,” said Maud, “when your uncle talked about you, I thought to myself ‘here is another girl as lonely as I am. Why shouldn’t we be together?’”

“But you don’t know anything about me,” Kizzy replied, shaking her head doubtfully.

“Well,” said Maud, “people call me impulsive. I never give ideas time to develop. I act on them straight away; and if ever I regret, I just bear the thing alone, and don’t trouble other people with my regrets. I have a great longing to have you with me, partly because I think you are very little like me in character, and when we know each other,” she put in mischievously, “we shall quarrel on most subjects, and you know I rather like that; and, forgive me for saying it—you may believe me, because I am a woman speaking to a woman—you are so beautiful, you would be a continual feast to my eyes.”

The rich colour mounted to Kizzy's pale cheek again at this frank compliment, and then the tears gathered in her eyes, and she said despairingly —

“That seems to be of no consequence to me now.”

Maud was infinitely touched, and she kissed away the tears in a sweet, frank way all her own. “I won't take no. You must come and live with me,” she said. “I fell in love with you by hearsay first, but the sight of you—well, I wonder you've not been carried off like the girls in romances.”

“Dear Miss Harwyn,” Kizzy began, “it's very good of you ; but I ought to tell you a little how I am placed. I did not get on very well with father at home, and I got myself a situation ; but perhaps uncle told you this. I cannot go back home, and I cannot go back to that situation. I have been ill, and I have been here I don't know how many weeks. It is quite time I went away now. If it were not for this, I would have stayed with you a little time, you speak so kindly ; and I never saw any one I liked so much.”

“Of course I have not made myself understood,”

Maud broke out. "I rarely do when I want to most. I understood perfectly that you wanted a situation. Everybody wants me to have some cross old fogey for a companion; but I've always obstinately refused. I want some one young, to enter into my schemes, and enjoy life with me; but mammas are so strict nowadays, they wouldn't think of letting their daughters come to me; for, do you know, I live all by myself in a house."

Keziah looked startled.

"That is, with two servants—one old enough to be my mother. But you seem to be able to please yourself, so if you came to me nobody would interfere with you, and you would have relatives next door. The only thing I stipulate for, if you accept my offer, and you shall—you most certainly shall—is that there shall be no question of money between us."

Kizzy was about to interrupt.

"Don't interrupt me," said Maud. "I want to explain my plan. On the first day of every month I get a certain sum from my bankers; I am so stupidly rich, you know. I keep two purses—one

for housekeeping, the other for my nondescript expenditure. I shall keep another purse now for you, and put in it as much as I put in the last for myself; and I am so extravagant, I am sure you will find it enough."

She was much surprised that Kizzy did not close with this at once. She answered the look of the girl rather than any words.

"That is very unkind of you," Maud exclaimed. "Why should you not come to me as well as to any one else?"

"You don't understand me," replied Kizzy. "Your plan is like my being dependent upon you. I cannot be that. If I come to you, I must come for a small salary such as I am worth. I cannot receive benefits from you which would close my mouth and take away my freedom." And here a proud look came into the fine face, yet calm and gentle, which somewhat abashed her companion. The tears welled up into Maud's eyes.

"I can't expect you to know me in one meeting," she said.

"That is true," replied Kizzy, with gentle

dignity. "It is true for both of us. Had you known me, you could not have made me such a proposal."

"And had you known me," rejoined Maud, "I think you would have accepted it."

Kizzy gently shook her head. "We cannot begin," she said, "where we have only a faint chance of ending. Your plan should be the result of years of testing, and of coming together, so to speak. To try to begin so would be to kill every possibility. You are all kindness, I see it in your face. Yet you want to clip my wings, you who can go everywhere and do everything. You like to spend your pounds, feeling they are your own. Leave me to spend my pence feeling they are my own."

"You despise my plan," replied Maud; "but yours is ridiculous. If we're to go on for years, laying traps for each other, and keeping up the very widest and strongest distinction of *meum* and *tuum*, where would it all end? We should never trust each other at all."

"You forget," responded Kizzy gravely, "that your proposal demands exorbitant trust on my part, and leaves you still free."

“At any rate,” went on Maud, growing desperate, “who knows where we shall be before years enough pass to try your way? You will be marrying and going away from me.”

There was something like scorn in Kizzy’s face as she said, still with calmness, “I don’t think I am likely to marry, Miss Harwyn. I was on the point of it once, and it all ends there.”

“Your uncle told me about your trouble,” said Maud compassionately.

“Uncle didn’t know much,” replied Kizzy dreamily. “Nobody knows much but myself.”

“But nothing is proved against your lover yet, Kizzy,” said Maud, calling her by her Christian name for the first time.

Kizzy put her hands out before her as if to ward off a blow, and said in a voice much like a cry, “Do not speak of it, you cannot understand it. I have never told anybody the rights of it all. I went away, I can’t remember where I went. I hoped I should die. I remember nights passed in a deserted house, where there were rumblings underneath. I wanted it to fall in on me, and bury me for ever.

Houses often fall about there ; and there was an explosion, I know that is true, and that I did not dream it, because the baby's here now ; and somehow a thought came to me, that I might perhaps work out the salvation of both of us, and he and I might meet again in another world."

Maud did not understand all this. How should she, unless she had known of the forged letter ?

"I know about the baby," Maud said. "We will have the baby with us. You shall come to me on what terms you like, if you will only come. You shall be my model, my guide ; you shall save me from my selfish self. It's a revelation to see one so high-souled and so beautiful at once. Now, say, when can you be ready to come to me ?"

"I must go home for a few days," said Keziah. "I have not seen mother since I was ill. And please, Miss Harwyn, don't talk to me as you have done just now. Indeed, you don't know my heart. What you talk of is only what I want to be, not what I am."

"Well, well, you can't change my opinions,"

replied Maud. "But, won't you show me the baby you rescued?"

"Gladly," said Keziah, and the two girls went together to the nursery.

On her way home to the Laytons', Maud was so pre-occupied about Keziah, that she twice failed to recognise people she knew perfectly well. One of these sharply reined up his horse, and dismounting, gravely held out his hand and said, "This is not kind of you, Miss Harwyn, to torture me with the sight of you, when we can never be anything to each other, never."

"Am I never to come near my friends, Mr. Towers, because you take a foolish fancy into your head?" said Maud, her indignation rising against him.

"I thought you would understand, Miss Harwyn, that I am bound hand and foot, that I can marry nobody, much less you."

"Do you think you could marry me if you liked?" rejoined Maud, hot and angry. "You talk as if I were only waiting for you to ask me, to accept you. Ah, Mr. Towers, had you been a man

of money and position, you would not have found me so lenient as I have shown myself."

"That is only your way of upbraiding me for not being a man of money and position," retorted Towers with equal bitterness.

"If I wanted to upbraid you," replied Maud, "I would not go roundabout. I do upbraid you for not working better, and getting your qualification."

"How can outsiders judge of one's situation? You are very unjust to me?"

"I dare say I think better of you than you deserve."

Towers coloured. "To hear you talk, one would think you hated me," he said.

"I have a very real contempt for a man, who, at thirty years of age, settles down without a qualification he has been trying after all his life."

"Your words are very cruel, more cruel than you think," said the doctor, mounting his horse, and riding rapidly away.



CHAPTER XVI.

SHADOWS OF COMING EVENTS.



WHEN Kizzy reached Jumley railway station, she found her cousin waiting for her with her father's dogtrap. Mr. Hackbit, not at all sure of his ground, made no imprudent overtures. A loving nature is sensitive to kindness; and Mr. Hackbit lost no opportunity, however trivial, of showing her respectful attention.

When the cousins had got inside the house, it became evident to them both that a difference of opinion was occurring in the dining-room, and that it was taking the form of rather violent language. But this was nothing new to either of them.

The disputants were Joshua Rimmon and his

sister Dorcas. Kizzy looked at her cousin resignedly. They knew by past experience that this dispute might last for hours.

Sarah fairly cried for joy at sight of her young mistress, though the poor girl had something else to cry for, her lover having been brought up as black as a cinder, from the pit, three days after the explosion in the Troworth Hill mines.

“Oh, never mind, Miss Kizzy,” she said, referring to the disturbance in the house. “Your mother’s in the kitchen.”

Mrs. Rimmon, however, had heard the voices, and was close upon them; and she began to hug her daughter with a vehemence that was quite astonishing from one of her apathetic temperament.

Mr. Hackbit, with great unconcern, entered the room where his uncle and aunt were disputing.

Mr. Rimmon was seated in his own chair by the fire, with his back towards his sister, who for her part was standing like an offended deity, at a little distance, bonneted and shawled. Neither of them took any notice of their nephew; they continued their discussion.

“It will injure my position very much indeed, your taking to going to Church,” said Mr. Rimmon.

“Injure you, indeed,” burst forth Miss Dorcas, tossing her head energetically. “And who are you, I should like to know?”

“I’ll tell you what people will say,” said Mr. Rimmon, looking into the fire. “They will say you have gone to run after the new curate.”

“Me run after him!” shrieked the offended spinster. “And hadn’t he been at least a dozen times in my shop before I entered his church? And didn’t he say to me, ‘It would make me happier if I saw you in church, Miss Rimmon?’”

“No doubt,” said Joshua sardonically. “It would make him happy to see me there too, and every dissenter in Junley. For my part, I wonder you can sit in the church and see all those boys in nightgowns, and such a waste of candles, and hear him in that ridiculous tone of voice read a sermon somebody else has written.”

“Somebody else has written!” reiterated Miss Dorcas in a furious voice. “You couldn’t write a

sermon at any rate ; no, not if he paid you ten thousand pounds to do it."

"I've no ambition that way," observed Mr. Rimmon, superciliously.

"I know better than that," sneered his sister. "You'd give anything to be on the plan, and be a local preacher."

"I'm not very likely to be anything, if you're disgracing the family in this way."

"Disgrace the family by marrying a gentleman of position, who has been at Oxford!"

"Oh, so you're engaged to him, are you? Poor fellow."

"If I'm not exactly engaged to him, I shall be soon."

At this point the spinster heard a chuckle behind her ; and turning round, beheld her nephew immersed in a newspaper, with no signs of laughter upon his face. She turned angrily upon him.

"You needn't pretend you were not laughing, Thomas."

"I'm not pretending anything," observed Hackbit, unconcernedly.

“Oh, aren’t you! You’re a credit to the family anyway, you are, Thomas, getting drunk and behaving like a beast, and kissing low girls.”

“I haven’t kissed any low girls,” replied the nephew, with a half-smile upon his countenance.

“Haven’t you, indeed?” rejoined his aunt, raising her voice. “I suppose you didn’t confess, then, that you had kissed Martha Timmins at this very door?”

“Oh, is she a low girl?” asked Hackbit abstractedly. “I didn’t know you kept any low girls; I thought all your people were young ladies.”

“Well, what do you want to quarrel with me for?” replied his aunt peevishly.

“Well, really, I am not aware that I began it.”

“I daresay not. You never do anything wrong. You are a pattern of all the virtues, you are.”

“Pile it up,” observed Hackbit, going on reading.

“Pile what up?” inquired Dorcas, not understanding. “What do you mean? Something vulgar, I imagine, or you wouldn’t say it.”

“Have it your own way,” said her nephew coolly.

On hearing this, Miss Dorcas left the room.

Meanwhile, Kizzy’s weak but affectionate mother

was crying over her darling, and was almost insisting on feeding her as if she had been a child.

Kizzy wanted to talk to her, but somehow an uncontrollable silence was upon her. This may have been because she had such a horror of saying what might not be understood; and one sad subject occupying her mind completely, she could not make conversation upon another.

At last she asked with an effort what aunt Dorcas was talking about.

“Your father is angry with her; she has joined the Church of England, and has been getting herself talked about. Your father says it’s because the young curate asked her.” Then leaving the subject, Mrs. Rimmon said, “Your father is angry with Jubal too. He’s taken to signing himself, J. Rimmon, again; and when his father complained, he wrote back that if his father wanted obedience in great things, he might as well lay a little less stress upon small things. Your cousin Thomas read the letter, and he laughed till he shook. It made your father quite unwell, and I had such a night with him after.”

"What is father going to do about Jubal?" asked Kizzy, really interested now.

"He says he shall be put to work at once, at prospecting; and Jubal says he doesn't care how soon he does go. I can't think what has come over Jubal; he used to be mild enough."

"A great deal too mild," said his sister. "But when does he leave?"

"Well, there's a quarter's notice been given for him."

"I wish father would put him with uncle David," remarked Kizzy, thoughtfully. "I believe Jubal would have preferred that."

"That would be a reason for your father's not letting him go. But how tired you look, my child. Really you ought to go straight to bed."

"Oh, I am all right," replied Keziah. "You mustn't notice my looks." She tried hard to brighten up, and began to tell of her arrangements with Miss Harwyn.

"I wish you had been going back to Mrs. Beredith," her mother said, when she had heard all.

"But I couldn't," said Kizzy wearily.

As she said this, the hall door was slammed. It was Dorcas taking her leave. Kizzy rose, and was about to quit the kitchen, when her cousin stood before her. He had formed a new resolution. Was it not as well to cage his bird, if possible? Was not every moment of delay a danger when a woman was so handsome?

“Cousin,” he began, “would you give me a few moments’ conversation with you?”

“Very well;” and she sat down again.

“Not here,” said Hackbit persuasively. “Won’t you come into the dining-room? There’s no one there now.”

She obeyed, as if doing a penance, and went with him to the dining-room.

“Do not be angry with me,” said the lawyer, closing the door.

“Why should I be angry?” replied the girl wearily.

“But if anything I say to you should appear to be sufficient cause?”

Kizzy looked frightened. She thought he was going to speak of her lover.

“I mean well by you, Kizzy—indeed I do,” he began.

“Then don’t mention his name to me,” entreated Kizzy, turning her head away.

He stood silent for a few moments. No one would have guessed from the repose of his attitude what a battle was raging within him. It was one of those moments in his life when good and evil were fighting for possession of him. He had really grown to have a mad passion for this girl, for her rare beauty, her alternately caressing and passionate ways; but now, as he looked at her and thought of the utter guilelessness of her heart, he felt something like a criminal in seeking to join her lot with his. Truly he was within a hairsbreadth of telling this girl that the letter she had received was a forgery. If he did this, he would win her regard for ever; but it would be renouncing her, and this thought was maddening at the moment. Would that shapely head with its shining black curls never rest upon his breast? He must possess her. He would give up drinking. He would be the best husband upon earth to her.

“Kizzy,” he broke out, “you don’t know how much I love you. I know I ought not to speak about it; you are so far above me. But then, Kizzy, you will make me better than I am.”

“Don’t say any more,” cried Kizzy piteously; “I can’t bear it.”

“At least hear me,” pleaded her cousin. “That commits you to nothing. You know the worst of me, cousin.” (How far that was from being true!) “You have known me all my life. Have you ever known me say what I didn’t mean?”

“I have always thought there was plenty of good in you,” replied the girl in a low voice.

“Then you will listen to me?”

Kizzy remained silent. She had become used to bearing.

“I can offer you a good home, and everything you can wish for. I would adopt that baby—I would indeed. And you are not strong enough now to face the world. How could you provide for the baby? You are very independent, Kizzy. Think how much better it would be for you to have a home of your own by right. And you so

like being kind to people. Think how much more you could do with a house of your own and money of your own. What should you do if your health failed you? Should you come home to your father?"

"I could die," replied the girl doggedly.

"You might want to; but people who want to die never do: and who would care for the baby if you did?"

Kizzy looked up with a wan smile, like the wraith of her old merriment. "Haven't you just said you would adopt the baby?"

"With its foster-mother—not otherwise. But, dearest Kizzy, don't give me an answer now; only tell me I may ask you again. At least you can grant me that, Kizzy. I have been silent so long for your sake. Tell me I may speak to you again, after a long time—as long as you like."

"It would be of no use at all," she said. "You may if you like, but it would be of no use." She had suffered so herself, it hurt her now to inflict pain on him.

"Bless you for that," said her cousin.

“Say no more about it,” replied Kizzy desperately. “You are in love with a dead one.”

Nevertheless he left her with a kind of hope ; and his first inclination was to get a stiff glass of brandy and drink her health, but he stopped himself. “No, I will not drink another drop till I know she won’t have me.”

The following day Keziah faced a new difficulty. She had no money, and she must have new clothes before going to Miss Harwyn. She would not ask her father for a penny, she had such terrible fears as to how he came by his money. She confided her trouble to Sarah. She knew it was of no use to tell her mother.

Sarah immediately offered her little savings ; but this Kizzy absolutely refused to accept, unless neither of them could think of another plan.

“Have you thought of asking your uncle David, Miss Kizzy ?” Sarah suggested.

This was the very idea. Keziah at once sat down and wrote :—

MY DEAR UNCLE,—I am sure you would like to do me a kindness. I am going to Miss Harwyn as companion,

but my clothes are rather shabby, and I am very unwilling to go without some new ones. Very few would suffice. I should be so glad if you would lend me a little money. You will understand I do not like to ask my father for money. But if you send me some, do me the further kindness—and this will be the greater in my eyes—of not refusing to let me repay it when I get my first money. In justice to father, I ought to say that he offered me some money this morning. Do not blame me, dear uncle ; I could not take it.

I am so glad to think of living near you and dear old grandmother. I shall come as soon as I can get my clothes made, for I know you will send the money ; so, thanking you in advance, and with my best love to you and grandmother,

I am, your loving niece,

KEZIAH.

Two days later came the answer. It ran as follows :—

MY DEAR NIECE,—I am proud to be of service to you, now and always. If the ten-pound note enclosed is not sufficient, let me know. Count me as your debtor to any amount.

And now, my dear niece, let me tell you what I think about this. It is very hard for those people who have all the will to give, and have nothing to give. But it is harder still for those who, having plenty of money, have no one who cares for them enough to accept anything from them. Let this speak to you, and I don't think you will be hard-hearted enough to return me the money. In my heart and

house there is a home for you whenever you will take it ; and for Jubal too. How happy I should be if you lived with me. But it will be something to have you next door. Miss Harwyn is such a sweet young lady, you will be happy with her.

I have known what it is to be poor, my Kizzy, and to long for the things displayed in the Junley shop windows ; and now I look at the Manchester shop windows with gold in my pockets ; but what is the use of my buying the pretty things, with no one to give them to ? I have never tried you since you were a little one ; but that's my cowardly way. But your letter has encouraged me, and if you would let me buy a little thing that takes my fancy and give it to you, and not mind if it turns out of no use, you will give me a great pleasure. Your confidence in me has made me so happy, I beg you will never return me the money.

Your grandmother is much better, and sends her love to you.

I am, always, your true friend and affectionate uncle,

DAVID RIMMON.

Kizzy was crying before she had got through this letter. It was not her way to cry ; but her trouble had weakened her, and his kindness touched her so deeply. She ended by carrying her ten-pound note in triumph to the kitchen.

Mr. Rimmon, to do him justice, had tried to make himself agreeable to his daughter since she had come home. His vile conspiracy against his

daughter was an appalling load upon his mind, and he vainly thought to atone by extra kindness—kindness due to a daughter as her right under ordinary conditions.





CHAPTER XVII.

THE REV. BROUGHAM BANNER.



HE curate of St. Margaret's, already several times alluded to, was no small star in the murky Jumley horizon. To increase his lustre, he made use of an immoderate number of candles, in defiance of the feelings of the majority of Jumleyites. Was it not in Jumley that the famous John Wesley preached one of his most remarkable sermons? and was it not in Jumley that one of the earliest Methodist chapels had been erected?

It is probable that these facts were known to the clergyman, for he used to say, in his grandest manner, that in Jumley he felt he was routing the

enemy in his stronghold. His knowledge, however, was due to a cause carefully kept in the background; he had been brought up a Methodist, and had himself sought to enter the Wesleyan ministry; but failing to pass the required examinations, he had found refuge in the Church of England, whose arms have so frequently opened to receive the rejected of other denominations.

The rector of St. Margaret's was well stricken in years, and troubled himself very little as to his curate's line of conduct, so long as the congregations kept up. There could be no doubt that this condition was fulfilled under the Rev. Brougham Banner's ministry, but as to the reasons for this we had better not inquire too closely. Curiosity was one strong stimulant. Mr. Rimmon's depreciation of the curate's sermons was very justifiable; for most of his hearers owned that they had nothing in them. They were not likely to have much in them, for Mr. Banner wrote them himself, notwithstanding Mr. Rimmon's assertion to the contrary. But the curate trusted, not without reason, in the strength of a sepulchral voice, united to a highly attractive

musical service. Certain voices in particular, hired at some cost, produced a striking effect in the solos, which were liberally scattered. One magnificent bass would have led the soul heavenward by the richness and pathos of his singing, but that his face was considerably bloated, and irresistibly led one's thoughts to those palaces of devotion to drink, where the complexion is painted for a man at a small cost per day. Surely this is an argument in favour of invisible choirs.

Under the new *régime*, the altar cloth had assumed a magnificence hitherto unheard of in Jumley. A cross of wonderful workmanship, before which a number of candles burned, was placed above the altar. But while the Rev. Brougham saw to it that the Sunday and early daily services should be impressive, he considered that his strength lay in his visiting every house in his parish, and constituting himself the spiritual adviser, to use no harsher term, of as many as would be led. In other cases, where a certain intelligence of countenance, together with a look of determination, warded off every effort of his in this direction, he would make himself as agreeable

as possible, and as inoffensive. So it happened that on some terms or other he had access to most houses. He was vaguely informed on many subjects; and surface information, discreetly used, goes a long way towards deceiving people into belief in profundity of knowledge. It followed that he could talk with everybody: and whenever he felt himself on the border of a fog, he brought to the fore his listening faculty, in which he was unsurpassable. On the whole it will be seen that this gentleman was an inexpressible loss to the Church of Rome, in which his faculties would have had fuller play.

On the morning after Miss Dorcas Rimmon's conversation with her brother, on Church *versus* Dissent, Miss Timmins and Miss Burgess, two of her assistants, were engaged in displaying some new triumphs of millinery art in the window of Miss Dorcas's shop, which was situated in the High Street of Jumley, and commanded a larger proportion of the pavement than any other shop in the street. The goods displayed in the windows were showy, in the height of fashion, and very expensive. Miss Rimmon used to boast that every article was marked

in plain figures, and that nothing could induce her to take off a half-penny. But then the articles she sold were invariably good, and the work was irreproachable. It was well known that Miss Rimmon had a comfortable balance at her banker's, besides investments, which made her, so to speak, independent of customers. Miss Rimmon had had little to begin with ; but if she had had sixpence a week to live upon, she would doubtless have saved five-pence half-penny out of it. Her apprentices of course, paid dearly for the privilege of being under her ; and they were ill-fed when they lived in the house, hard-worked in any case, and always snubbed. Still, she understood her business well, and it was a great recommendation to any girl, to have been trained under Miss Rimmon.

While Miss Timmins and Miss Burgess were displaying the bonnets in the window, who should pass but the Rev. Brougham Banner. He paused a moment, and appeared to consider something, then turned into the shop. He touched his broad-brimmed hat as he entered, and greeted the young ladies with a grave, pastoral " Good morning," made

some common-place remarks about the weather, and produced some tracts.

“We have very little time for reading,” remarked Miss Timmins.

“We must not neglect our sacred duties for the profitless works of the world,” urged the clergyman. “Eternal truth lives, while bonnets pass away.”

“That may be true,” returned Miss Timmins, rather sharply. “But we are in the world, and we must live; and for that we must work early and late.”

“Yes,” added Miss Burgess; “early and late, and for bread.”

“The bread of heaven is without money and without price,” rejoined the curate, in his most parsonic tone.

“It’s all very well, sir,” replied Miss Timmins, “for clergymen like you to talk in that way. Your money is sure, and you can afford to give time to those things. But we poor girls must be practical or starve.”

“On the Sabbath day at any rate, you can read these tracts,” answered the curate. “Then you are

released from the toils which beset the week, and may look to your spiritual state. I wish I could see you at the morning service, both of you."

"Well, sir," said Miss Burgess. "We work till twelve o'clock on Saturday night, and most other nights, and we like to rest a bit on Sunday morning. It's the only rest we get for the week."

"Do you not think there is a danger," went on the clergyman, in an ominous tone, "of your Saturday night's work going on into the sacred Sabbath?"

"We always leave off at twelve," replied Miss Timmins.

"But your clock may be wrong," suggested Mr. Banner.

"Well, sir, we can't help it," said the girl.

The conversation was interrupted by the appearance of a head at the glass door separating an inner room from the shop. The head was crowned with copper-coloured hair. The girls instantly went about their work; and Miss Rimmon with a face beaming, entered the shop, and held out a skinny hand to the curate.

“How d’e do, Miss Rimmon !” said that gentleman.

“Well, Mr. Banner. I’ve been very busy of late, there’s been so much mourning to make since the explosion ; and Junley folks always have their mourning made by me, and of course that means a great deal of work for me personally, for it’s very little help these chits of girls are to anybody—they want so much showing.”

“Ah, it was a sad thing, that explosion,” observed the curate. “I was on the pit bank soon after, and my blood ran cold at the awful profanity that came from the mouths of the women, brought there face to face with God’s judgments. You will scarcely believe it, Miss Rimmon, but some of those women actually swore at me, a minister of the Church.”

Miss Dorcas held up both her hands in horror.

“Yes, they actually did ; and they threatened me, too.” He was inwardly thinking, too, of a certain practical joke that had been played upon him, in spite of his cloth ; but he avoided any reference to the topic. “I have tried to serve my flock in my poor way,” he went on.

“No one knows that better than I do,” said Miss Dorcas sweetly. “But won’t you come into my little parlour and sit down?—so many people come in and out of the shop.”

“I suppose you have a large custom?”

“I have nothing to complain of.”

“But much to be thankful for,” added Mr. Banner.

“And I trust I am thankful.”

“I hope,” said the curate, plunging again into conversation when seated in the sitting-room, “that you have been trying to do something to induce your brother to come to church. His influence is so great in Jumley, I know many others would follow in his train.”

“I fear it’s of no use trying,” replied Miss Rimmon with a gentle smile; “he’s so obstinate.”

“Have you tried to do anything with your nephew, Mr. Hackbit? I am sure he lives near enough to attend my services; and I fear very much he is in the wrong way.”

“Oh, Thomas won’t listen to a word I say, ever. If he knew I wanted him to do anything, he would do just the opposite, to spite me.”

"I can hardly understand anyone wanting to spite you," rejoined the clergyman suavely.

The milliner simpered, and moved a little nearer the curate, who went on, "I must try what I can do with him myself."

"Oh, pray, don't," said Miss Dorcas, really alarmed. "Thomas would—I really don't know what Thomas would not do. I beg of you, don't go to him."

"If he is so far astray, the more is it my duty to show him the error of his ways."

"My advice to you is, don't go," reiterated Miss Dorcas.

"Your conversation, Miss Rimmon, reminds me of the language used to Christian by his friend when he was about to leave the City of Destruction. You have read *The Pilgrim's Progress*, have you not, Miss Rimmon?"

"Oh, yes," she replied, "and wept over it many a time."

"For my part, I find it a most encouraging book," said the curate. "You see Christian always conquered."

“ Oh, I meant tears of joy,” said Miss Rimmon. finding she had taken a wrong tack.

“ I must beg you to excuse my running away,” observed Mr. Banner, looking at his watch. “ Pleasure bids me stay, but duty bids me go.”

Miss Rimmon smiled her sweetest. “ Don’t be long before you come again,” she said ; “ I am so lonely. I have no spiritual intercourse but with you.” As the clergyman rose, she stretched out both her hands to him, and he experienced some difficulty in liberating his own, so firm was the grip of Miss Dorcas. As he passed into the street she looked lovingly after him. He, poor youth, was thinking how her left forefinger had scratched him, being positively like a nutmeg grater with so much sewing ; and with that she passed completely out of his thoughts.

At the corner of the street Mr. Banner stumbled against Thomas Hackbit. Here was a golden opportunity for the parson.

“ Good morning, Mr. Hackbit,” he began, in his most priestly tone.

“ Mornin’,” said Hackbit, and was about to pass on.

“My dear sir,” said the clergyman, “do give me a few moments’ conversation with you.”

“Well, I’m in a deuced hurry,” rejoined Hackbit, taking out his watch. “What do you want with me?”

The reverend gentleman was somewhat puzzled how to reply, having had no time to prepare for the attack; so he stood silent.

“Want to borrow some money, I suppose,” said Hackbit, helping him out. “You parsons are good at getting into debt, I know.”

The clergyman turned very red. “You are wrong, Mr. Hackbit,” he replied coldly. “It was in your interest, not in mine, that I stopped you.”

“I am quite capable of taking care of myself,” retorted the lawyer, “and don’t want anybody meddling in my affairs.”

“In a worldly sense, Mr. Hackbit, you may be right,” replied the curate, very ill at ease; “but in looking to the temporal, I fear you forget the eternal.”

“Eternal fiddlesticks,” broke out Hackbit; “if

that's all you stopped me for, I'll say good morning."

"But I beg of you to listen to a word or two more," said Mr. Banner, furtively gazing at his companion, on whose face he perceived a cynical smile.

"Well, be quick about it, for I'm in a hurry," said Hackbit, again consulting his watch.

"You can't think how much I admired the valiant way you went down the pit that night of the explosion."

"You did not follow my example, however," retorted Hackbit.

"The spirit was willing, but the flesh was weak," answered the clergyman.

"Yes, you don't look very strong."

"Physically, I am not."

"Well, there's one thing — you've an easy enough life of it; you're not killed with work."

"My dear friend," replied the clergyman, "you can scarcely realise my work. Even now I am about my Master's business in saying these few words to you."

"Then I think you bungle a good deal."

"But I was about to observe," went on the curate, "that when I saw you descend that coal mine, I thought to myself, 'There's energy and daring which, if turned into a right channel, might be the means of saving many souls.'"

"It wasn't in a wrong channel in saving bodies, at any rate."

"I do not pretend to say that it was."

"Look here," said Hackbit decisively : "if you want to talk this kind of rubbish, go and talk to my aunt Dorcas ; she's fool enough to listen to you. If you want a theological argument, go up to my uncle Joshua ; and if you want a small loan, you can come to me. I am an agent for a first-rate firm—money without security. So, good morning." And with this, Mr. Hackbit turned and walked rapidly away, leaving the discomfited clergyman gazing after his retreating figure.





CHAPTER XVIII.

MONSIEUR PELBOIS.



THE principal inn in Langton was known by the title of the "Bull's Head," and thither a goodly number of Langtonians gathered to spend convivial evenings, and drink home-brewed ale out of shining pewter-pots, in a large stone-floored kitchen, where a fire of enormous dimensions burned in cheerful welcome.

A few evenings after what we have just narrated, this kitchen held its usual number of boon companions, each having his pipe and his pewter-pot, and his own allotted place around the fire. Some of the company could boast of having sat in the same place twenty years, a fact which added not a little to their sense of dignity.

The man of all the company who had been longest there, and who was by far the most cantankerous of the party, was the sexton, Jody Waddy. This individual had the only arm-chair allotted to him. This in itself invested him with a kind of superiority ; and it was well known that his humour gave the tone to the meeting. If he were grave, the whole party became grave ; if, on the other hand, his spirits were high, the spirits of the entire assemblage rose in consequence.

On the evening of which we are writing, Jody's spirits were low, and consequently a general moroseness reigned, and the smoking went on in grumpy silence. The advent of a stranger at such a time could scarcely be welcome ; but a stranger did arrive, in an extraordinary kind of dark cloak and slouch hat, which but partially hid a powerful, swarthy, foreign face.

A light snow had fallen, and this stranger's cloak was covered with it ; and he flung it from him as he entered the kitchen. By the merest chance it besprinkled Jody Waddy, at which that gentleman took mortal offence.

"Mind what yer a-doin' of," he called out, in a cantankerous tone of voice.

"Pardon," said the stranger, in a supercilious tone.

"Pardon!" said Jody; "pardon, indeed; it's an article you're in want of, I guess."

The stranger, in answer, indicated his desire to have a place by the fireside, and called for coffee and brandy. No one else in the company had spoken.

"*Diable*," cried the stranger. "What's the matter with you all?"

"Matter?" said a carpenter, who was nearest the stranger. "There's darned matter enough, I suppose, to have a darned furriner coming in interrupting good company."

The stranger shrugged his shoulders, and with a light laugh said—

"Your nation is not famous for its politeness; O perfide Albion!"

"If you want to swear," said Jody, "swear in English."

"My good friend," replied the foreigner, "swearing is more in your line, I fancy."

The company looked at one another.

“No wonder you swear, my friends. What a climate! What a climate!” and he shuddered.

“Climate!” said Jody; “it’s as good as yours, any way.”

“Were you ever in France, my friend?” inquired the stranger, stretching his long legs out towards the blaze.

“No; and never mean to go, that’s more,” said Jody.

“They’d give us nothing but frogs to eat,” said the carpenter, who sat next to him.

“The frog is a very good animal to eat,” remarked the stranger. “You in England eat the insides of pigs and other dirty animals with a British relish, all stewed up with a distinct flavour of onions. *Oh, ciel*, what a taste these English have! You haven’t got such a thing as a theatre in this place, I suppose,” he went on. “I was never here before.”

“Theatre!” responded Jody. “Nothing so low. We’ve got penny readings.”

“Penny what?” said the stranger, raising his swarthy face with an incredulous look.

"Penny readings. Are you deaf?" shouted Jody.

"My hearing is pretty good, thank you. I suppose you allude to a newspaper."

"No, we don't," put in the carpenter. "They are readings up at the Church school, of a Wednesday evening. The parson and ladies and gentlemen read and recite."

"Parson!" said the foreigner, with a sneer.

"Yes, parson," said Jody, nodding his head viciously. "None of your darned priests and Jesuits, and sichlike."

"I don't waste much affection upon priests," observed the stranger, with a chuckle.

"You don't look as if you'd got any affection for anything," said Jody.

The foreigner laughed an appreciative laugh.

"What sort of people have you living in the neighbourhood?" he asked. "Anybody of consequence?"

"No one particular," replied Jody, "unless lying in the churchyard."

"I do not refer to the dead," said the stranger, with a little grimace.

"I'm not going to have the dead run down," said Jody.

"I have not 'run down' the dead, as you call it."

"You'd better not," was Jody's response. "We are not going to have darned furriners runnin' down the dead."

"I don't quite understand your expression, my friend. I have heard of running down hill. Perhaps you are doing that."

Jody, who was very much at a loss, reiterated his former remark with increased vigour, causing the girl who was at that moment bringing in the coffee, together with a portion of brandy in a glass, to put on a broad grin.

The gentleman for whom this beverage was intended took it from the waiter in a lordly fashion, and asked the girl in a careless way if anyone called Towers lived in the neighbourhood.

"Dr. Towers, do you mean, sir?" said the girl.

"*Certainement*, the doctor Towers," replied the stranger.

“Yes, he does live in the neighbourhood, sir, at the corner house at the top of the High Street.”

“Can any of you indicate to me which is the High Street?” asked the stranger of the company generally.

Jody replied that he was going that way soon. “If the furriner would be quick and drink up that wash of his, I’d show him. But,” he added in an incredulous tone, “I don’t believe the doctor wants any darned furriners.”

“Perhaps not,” said the stranger, again laughing, and pouring his brandy into his coffee and drinking half of it at a single gulp.

The girl had been putting some coals on the fire, and was about to leave the room, when the stranger said—

“I shall want a bed here to-night, my girl. I suppose I can have one.”

“Yes, sir,” answered the maid.

The foreigner put on his cloak, took up a strange-looking bag he had brought with him, and sallied forth into the winter night, with the odd little figure of the sexton beside him. They had not proceeded

far when the foreigner struck against a projecting flight of steps, and, floundering out of their way, stumbled into a rut in the road.

“*Diable !*” he ejaculated fiercely. “Is there no man in the neighbourhood to whom it is the duty to see roads kept in repair ?”

“The road’s quite good enough for darned furriners,” said Jody. “It’s that brandy you’ve been drinking.”

“You are in a quarrelsome frame of mind, my friend,” replied the stranger.

Jody answered by a grunt.

“Has your Dr. Towers a good practice ?”

“Yes, he has,” said Jody sharply. “What have you got up with yer as you want him ?”

“There is nothing the matter with me, my friend.”

Jody stopped short, and putting his hands upon his hips, projected his chin, and looked very fierce indeed, except that it was too dark for him to be seen.

“What do you keep on calling me yer friend for ? I ain’t any friend of darned furriners.”

“*Eh, bien !*” said his companion, shrugging his shoulders. “Do me the little kindness of indicating the doctor’s house to me, and I will rid you of my unwelcome company.”—And the two marched forward.

They were not long in gaining the doctor’s house. A sickly light burned in one of the small windows Mr. Saltring had complained of.

“That’s Doctor Towers’s,” said Jody.

“*Oh, mon Dieu,*” said his companion, “it is not a palace that my friend the doctor lives in.”

“Furrin doctors don’t live in palaces, they live in pigsties,” said Jody indignantly.

“In that little matter you are mistaken, my friend.”

“Oh Lord, I wish I hadn’t showed you the way at all,” said Jody. “You die here, and I’ll bury you a foot deep i’ water. That I do promise you.”

“I thank you, and have the honour to wish you good evening,” said the stranger, passing in at the small gate, and leaving the sexton to go where he pleased.

The foreign gentleman knocked at the door. It was opened immediately by a servant girl.

"Is the Doctor Towers visible?" the stranger asked.

"No, sir," said the girl; "he's out at present."

"Is Ma'em'selle his amiable sister within? Yes? Then I pray you to present her my card."

"Will you step into the surgery, sir?" said the girl.

"*Mais*, certainly," said the Frenchman; and he entered the small room, packed with drugs, and smelling of them almost to suffocation; so at any rate the foreigner thought, for he made dreadful grimaces, and took out of his bag a flask of eau-de-Cologne, and poured some of the contents upon his handkerchief.

The girl was so long before returning that monsieur was compelled to divert himself by turning over the leaves of a work on anatomy which lay on the table. And the walls of the room being very thin, he was distinctly heard to utter such exclamations as "*Degoûtant*," "*Bête*."

At last the servant returned, with a request that

he would come into the sitting-room, which he did with the greatest alacrity. He found but one person there when he entered. It was Miss Amy.

The visitor bowed profoundly. She advanced to meet him, but spoke no word. He spoke for her, in the most amiable manner.

“Do I see Ma’em’selle well?” he said sweetly. “Nay, do not refuse your hand. It is long since I touched it.”

“Oh, do not waste time in mock civilities, Monsieur Pelbois,” said Miss Towers, her face very white.

“*Bon*,” said M. Pelbois. “That is as you like. My amiable brother-in-law is from home. How long will it be before he returns?”

“That need not trouble you, Monsieur Pelbois,” said Miss Amy. “Tell me your business, and pray be as brief as possible.”

“*Comme vous voulez*,” he answered, with perfect good humour. “Then perhaps you will tell me if you have seen my amiable wife, who is separated from me since a long time.”

Amy turned even paler. "How should it matter to you where my sister is?" she replied.

"Matter to me!" he said, with a cynical smile creeping over his face, and fixing itself. "Is it remarkable, then, that I should wish to know where is my wife?"

"Surely you can leave her in peace," said Amy. "You took no care to keep her while you had her. Why need you disturb her now?"

"Then you have seen her," he replied. "And she is in the house, *n'est-ce pas?*"

"She is in the house, but you shall not see her," said Amy, stoutly.

Monsieur Pelbois laughed. "What a farce," he said. "I will explain myself, I think. I mean to take my wife away with me. She may be useful to me now. My profession at present is that of a conjurer, a prestidigitateur, and I have quarrelled with my musician; and I did bethink me of my amiable wife, who has a talent that way, and would render me that help."

"Will you tell me this one thing?" said Amy.

"What have you done with the property in Nebraska?"

Monsieur Pelbois bowed and smiled. "Done with the property in Nebraska, Ma'em'selle? I have done nothing with the property in Nebraska."

"Have you sold the farm?"

"Well, no, I have not sold the farm," he answered. "Circumstances over which I had no control precipitated my departure."

"And you left that property; ran away from it?" said Amy.

The gentleman bowed, still smiling.

"My poor sister's property!"

"Your amiable sister deserted it first."

"What do you suppose has become of it?"

"I regret that I cannot inform you. I have not been in communication with the place since I took my *congé*."

"What ever had you been doing, I wonder?" said Miss Amy.

"That was of a personal nature, and, I fear, would not interest you," said her brother-in-law, still smiling.

“ Pray tell me how long it is since you left Nebraska ? ”

“ Nearly a year.”

“ And since that time ?—— ”

“ Since that time I have revisited my native land. *Ah, la belle France !* I had not seen her for twenty years.”

During all this time they had both been standing; but at this point Amy thought it well to ask the visitor to sit down and await her brother's advent. This question of the property perplexed her sorely. “ Perhaps you will take some coffee ? ” she asked him.

“ I thank you, I have already partaken of refreshment at the Bool's Head, where also a bed awaits me. You see,” he added, “ I did not look for hospitality here ; you never could appreciate me.”

Amy made no reply to this, but looked anxiously towards the door and listened, longing for her brother to come.

He did come, and so far relieved her of anxiety ; but he went first into the surgery.

"It is long since I had the pleasure to hear the sound of that footstep," said Monsieur Pelbois.

Amy left him without an apology, and went to the surgery. "Robert," she said, nervously, touching him on the arm, "Eugène has come."

"Eugène! Then he's not dead."

"I never once thought him dead," said Amy. "And he wants Louisa to go with him and play music in public at wretched conjuring performances. And he has left poor Louisa's property without a soul to look to it; and it was all a lie about his brother living there. Oh, I wish we had gone out at once when we heard the first tidings, and seen about it. And now strangers have got it, no doubt. How ever shall we get rid of him?"

"He has not seen Louisa, has he?" asked the doctor, huskily.

"Not yet," said Amy. "But how am I to help it if he will see her?"

Dr. Towers passed her without an answer, and in a moment was face to face with his brother-in-law.

"*À la bonne heure!*" exclaimed that gentleman.

“How dare you come here?” was the doctor’s reply.

“What have I to be afraid of in coming? Tell me that. I am come to claim my own property. You can make no objection, is it not?”

“If you allude to my sister under that title, I have only one answer for you. You shall not see her.”

“*Mais* they are *drôles*, these English. But there is law to be had, even in England. The law will give me my wife.”

“The same law will put you in prison,” was the answer.

“I quite agree with you, if the law knew a reason,” replied Monsieur Pelbois. “But neither the law nor you are in that position, precisely.”

Now, Doctor Towers, who was perfectly sure there was plenty of reason, was not in possession of any proof whatever: but he answered desperately, “Do your worst. Try if you can get her from me.”

“I thank you for your good advice,” replied his brother-in-law. “I will not fail to follow it, except on one condition. I have already explained to

Mademoiselle your sister the purpose I have in wishing for the companionship of my wife. I desire her in the capacity of a musician. In other respects I have no desire at all for her. Her temper was not that of an angel. There were other things, too, which I will not now comment upon. But my musician at my performances costs me a certain sum. I am a conjurer by profession at this time, as I have already explained to Ma'em'selle your sister. I have travelled through many towns. Sometimes I made much money. In other places, to the contrary, I did not make enough to pay for my hall and my posters. It is needless to say that I left these places in the night time, and did not pay for my hall nor for my posters. But this did not make up for my loss of time. So I have not now much money. If you will forward to me, at an address I will give you, a sum which shall cover the cost of the musician I shall hire, I will not trouble Madame my wife."

Dr. Towers listened in gloomy silence to this recital, and at the end of it he cast an almost hunted look around the room, so meagre and destitute of

comforts. "Heavens!" he exclaimed, "how are we to live if I am to have another drain upon me?"

The foreigner laughed. "So the noble Herr still troubles you for a little cash occasionally, does he?" he said. "You see, the English, the always ever-innocent English, have occasionally their little secrets which must be kept in the dark."

"For God's sake, don't say any more, Pelbois," said Towers, flashing a look at him.

"You have a good practice, too," went on Monsieur Pelbois. "A most peculiar and eccentric old man told me so, who likewise accompanied me to your door, and whose pleasure it was to call me 'darned foreigner' every time he made occasion to speak to me."

"Listen a moment, Pelbois," said Towers. "You must get away from this place as soon as possible; and, pray, do not mention your name."

"I must rest this one night at the Bool's Head; and perhaps you will give me a little ready money to pay my hotel?"

The doctor plunged his hands into his trousers pockets, and brought out some gold, a little silver,

and a few pence, and, flinging it in a despairing way upon the table, said, "Who would believe, in Langton, that I am penniless this night?"





CHAPTER XIX.

DISAPPOINTED HOPES.



IZZY found her new home like a fairy paradise. At Mrs. Beredith's she had known luxury, but here it was combined with the presence of an original mind and with a person of artistic taste.

The hour of their arrival had been known to their neighbours, and David Rimmon, with his heart beating fast, was on the look-out for them. He opened the door himself as soon as they knocked. His first inclination appeared to be to speak to Maud before his niece; but he checked himself, and kissed Kizzy. Yet that acute young person could not help noticing how his hand

trembled. David seemed to lose all power of taking the lead in his own house; and Maud, with the easiest, frankest manner, led the way to the sitting-room.

"Your grandmother is not gone to bed, Kizzy," said her uncle; "and she is so longing to see you." And there, sure enough, was the old lady, almost hidden in a very high-backed chair.

Kizzy kissed her affectionately. With trembling lips the grandmother tried to say something, but gave up the attempt.

"What a beautiful dress you've got on, grandmother," said the girl, looking at her admiringly.

"Do you think it looks well, Kizzy?" said the old lady, finding her voice. Then she added in a low tone, "How long is it since I have had a new dress?"

"Never mind about that, grandmother."

"I'm quite in the shade now," put in Miss Harwyn, in a whimsical manner. "Before you came, Kizzy, Mrs. Rimmon made much of me; but she hasn't even spoken to me now."

In truth, the old lady had not seen her; and

now that she heard her voice, she called to her piteously. Maud kissed her on both cheeks, and then they all sat down, and the old lady roused up, and seemed inclined to talk.

“The servants are so wasteful here, Kizzy,” she said. “They throw away the tea-leaves, and they always have milk in their tea; and they let the fire blaze; and they have the gas when nobody’s reading or sewing; and they have meat for supper.”

“Never mind, if uncle likes it, grandmother.”

“But there’s something else I want to tell you, Kizzy. Your uncle won’t let me go into the kitchen, and he won’t let me speak about things to them, and everything’s going to ruin. The servants take no more notice of me than if I was a chair, they don’t. And I’m not so deaf as I was; and I heard them call me a cross old stick. I’m so glad you’ve come, Kizzy.”

David had gone out of the room for a moment; but he heard the last part of the conversation, and said almost impatiently—

“She’ll never rest in this world, now, Kizzy, not now she’s got the chance. To hear her talk you’d

think I was ever such a screw. My opinion can't move her. She won't end her days comfortably. And—and—I think there must have been some truth in what Joshua said." There was disappointment in his voice as he spoke.

"Don't be disheartened, Mr. Rimmon," said Maud. "It is hard for people to change at her time of life."

"I know that," said David ruefully. "I got her that dress from Manchester, and she wouldn't put it on till to-day. She sewed it up in a towel."

Poor David! He had imagined in taking his mother away from Jumley, that it would be quite a simple matter to make her happy, seeing that he could give her all that money could purchase. It was to be the "happy ever after" of the fairy tales. He did not know that those who have suffered until they are on the verge of the grave have not the power to be happy, be their circumstances ever so changed. Was ever a prisoner released from the Bastille, known to rejoice and blossom after twenty years' captivity?

Mrs. Rimmon positively suffered in being

surrounded by so many comforts ; and, as ever, the workhouse stared her in the face. To what other end could such extravagance lead ?

Keziah noticed that her grandmother looked very weary, and begged her to go to bed.

“ Oh, yes,” she replied feebly. “ I’ll go to bed. I’ll go to a narrower bed soon, and be no burden to nobody.”

It was very distressing, and poor David was nearly beside himself.

“ Come,” said Kizzy, gently taking one of her grandmother’s hands, “ I will go upstairs with you.”

It was with a look of abject misery that the old lady allowed herself to be led away.

“ Nothing I can do makes any difference,” said David, when they had gone. And he dropped his head on his hands, and groaned.

Maud was much moved ; and she laid a gentle hand on his shoulder, and said, “ Don’t be so miserable. Indeed, indeed, it is not your fault.”

“ It is only since she has been a bit better that she has got like this,” said David.

“ It may be better now Kizzy has come,” said

Maud. "We shall come in, and cheer her up when you are away. She will soon get to look at things differently."

He raised his head, and looked at his fair comforter, freely, and long, and earnestly, and as innocently as he might have done at a real angel, sent to cheer his dark road.

"You know, Mr. Rimmon," Maud went on, "you are quite unlike anyone I know. I don't think I quite understand you; but I do know you are very good, and I would do anything in my power to make you happy."

"Grandmother's in bed," said Kizzy, coming into the room. "Uncle, I've thought of a plan. Empty your pockets." This was in her old imperious manner. David mechanically obeyed. The first thing he produced was a tobacco pouch.

"Oh, put that away," she said with an arch smile. "I mean show me all the money you have about you. There," she said, taking up some gold and silver; "I'm going to take this up to grandmother. I've found out she has a little box, with a very little money in it. If we let her keep

this in it, she may get to feel safe from the workhouse."

The old lady was watching the door when Kizzy returned to her, and her face lit up when her granddaughter showed her the money. "Give me the box," she cried, "and my keys are in my pocket."

Kizzy was about to unwrap the best dress, which her grandmother had insisted on her wrapping up again in the towel.

"Not that dress," she exclaimed, "but the old dress there, hanging up."

Kizzy found the key sewn up in a funny little bag. "Give it to me," said the old lady sharply.

She cut the stitches first, and then handed it to her grandmother.

When the box was unlocked, a few shillings only were inside, the savings of her late years of penury. It was with a look of inordinate satisfaction that she added the gold and silver Keziah had brought, to her little hoard; but before she would lie down to rest, she must have the key sewn up again; and so it was a considerable time before Keziah returned

to her uncle and Miss Harwyn, and then Maud said it was quite time they went to dinner.

And these two young girls sat down in the stately dining-room of two hundred years before, and dined in a full blaze of wax tapers.

About a week later, while they were drinking tea together, Maud said to Keziah, "Do you know, I sympathise with your uncle David more than you would think."

"Why more than I should think?"

"Because you can't know my reason. I am to some extent in the same position as he is. He brought your grandmother, believing that his wealth and good nature would ensure her happiness. I brought you here with much the same feeling, and I have failed, quite as much as your uncle David. No, Keziah, don't interrupt me. I am baffled, mortified, and miserable, and the worst of it is, I have nobody to blame; so I lack the only solace a person in trouble ever has, in my opinion. It's a safety valve. Don't attempt to deny it, Keziah. You are not happy with me."

Keziah turned her great eyes upon her friend, and said, in a tone devoid of the slightest hesitation, "You are disappointed, because you hoped too much. I am content, because I didn't hope anything. Hope has gone out of my life."

"I don't know what you mean, I'm sure," said Maud, pettishly.

"Well, I'll try to explain it. You have the best heart in the world, Maud; but you haven't sound judgment. Your great anxiety was to find in me a pliable being, to be petted, indulged, and ruled over by you."

"I wouldn't have believed you could say such unkind things, Keziah."

"It sounds harsh, I know, Maud; but, you see, I've been brought up so differently from you, and am not much used to glossing things over. You have all your life been mistress of a fortune, so to speak. I have had nothing but myself to be mistress of, and, being cast much on my own resources, have been a leader in my way, and have certainly not allowed myself to be led. You are a leader, too, but chiefly by right of pounds, shillings, and pence, as if some-

body had bought you a commission in the army ; while I, as a private soldier, have had to work my way up. Not that I have reached any great degree of eminence yet ; but, in right of my own work and my own endurance, my soul refuses to be dictated to, though my reason suggests that it might be better if I sometimes were."

"Let me tell you for your good that you are terribly conceited, Keziah," said Maud, turning a little on one side.

"People usually are, who have fought their way as I have. And I will make you think me more conceited by saying that I feel myself more capable of leading you than you are of leading me. The hardest schools are the best schools after all ; and people living always at their ease on land cannot be in a position to dictate to an old sailor, at any rate on the subject of navigation."

"When have I ever tried to dictate to you ?" said Maud.

"You don't precisely dictate," replied Keziah ; "but then you suggest, in a way that makes it almost impossible for me to refuse without being offensive.

You don't say anything, but you look a great deal. Nothing would really suit you, short of my losing my individuality in yours, and falling in with everything you suggest. And I'll throw away my individuality for nobody. In some things I allow your judgment to be better than mine. I grouped the bunch of flowers in the picture just as you wished, because you are a better painter than I am."

"If you did that," said Maud, "you said there was far too much white in that painting I did of Venice."

"That was merely an opinion," rejoined Keziah. "But what did you do after I had said so? You did not pass over the remark for what it was worth, but must needs tear up and burn a picture really worth keeping, thus adding fuel to my conceit, as you call it, by showing me I had so much power over you."

"I did it to please myself, not you," said Maud.

"You were pleased enough with the picture until I complained of there being too much white; and then, after begging me to give an honest opinion, you got so angry as to destroy it. I tell you what I

think : you and I each want to dictate, and not be dictated to. My soul makes the greater demands, because you have money and I have not, because you have birth and I have not. I don't know how it is, Maud, but you rouse antipathy in me, and you rouse objections."

"Oh, Keziah," said Maud humbly, "I never could have been so mean as to wish to dictate to you."

"But you can't see how you act, Maud, as I expect I can't see how I do. Don't you think it would be wiser if we separated?"

"No, I don't," said Maud desperately. "I can't part with you, Keziah. You have taught me more, and done me more good than anything else in the world. Don't speak of going, Keziah. You shall do just as you like. No, I will do just as you like, if that way of putting it pleases you better."

"You mean what you say," said Keziah. "And yet to-morrow morning after breakfast you will suggest some plan for the day, and it will not be enough for you that I should agree with you, as I

invariably do. I must throw myself into it with avidity and delight such as your own; nothing less ever satisfies you; and your making this demand upon me makes me the less likely to respond, and irritates me."

"Don't say any more," said Maud. "I won't hear any more."

"That's only an example of what I say," said Keziah.

As the evening went on, harmony appeared to be restored, and the two girls went together to Maud's dressing-room and did their hair in company before going to bed. There had been no explanation, however, and no reconciliation; there had been merely an ignoring of what had occurred.

The next morning, when the girls were breakfasting, Keziah opened and read a letter which had come for her, and, having done so, put it into her pocket without remark.

Maud watched this action, and said nothing. But she broke the top off an egg in a very rough manner, and after tasting a spoonful of it, pushed it away. She next picked up the newspaper, which

always lay upon her breakfast table, and commenced reading to herself.

Keziah watched her uneasily for a few moments, and then said, "Why don't you read the news out as usual, Maud?"

"Why should I read my news to you? You read none of yours to me."

"Do you mean to say that you are angry because I have not shown you my letter? Don't you know that is very like compelling me to read it to you whether I like or not?"

"You see all my letters."

"But did I ever ask to do so?"

"I'll never mention your letters again," replied Maud, angrily.

"I shall not reward your ill-temper by reading it to you. You would probably have seen it after I had thought over it a little."

"Say what you like, Keziah; you know what things will annoy me, and I believe you do them on purpose."

"It would be difficult to find out what wouldn't annoy you in some humours of yours. I never could

have believed you had such a bad temper. It's quite clear to me we shall have to separate."

Maud this time made no comment, but sulkily read her paper; and, when she had finished, went into her studio without addressing Keziah.

Keziah, left in the room alone, walked with a firm step to a table where her own little desk lay, feeling bitterly that this small thing was her only possession in this room so full of things. She sat down on one of Maud's chairs, and felt that it was Maud's; and commenced to write a letter.

Her face was very white, but her hand did not tremble in the least. The letter was a short one. She put it into the envelope, addressed it, stamped it, and put it in her pocket. Having achieved this, she wondered what she should do next.

It occurred to her that she was here as companion to Miss Harwyn, and that it might be her duty to go into the studio, however much against the grain that might be. She decided to do so.

She found Maud painting fast and badly. Maud gave no sign as Keziah entered. Keziah went to her own little easel, and began to work

patiently and carefully on a much more modest little subject.

Half-an-hour passed, and neither girl spoke.

At the end of that time Maud threw down her painting materials, and, turning full on Keziah, said—

“How long are you going to be sulky?”

“As long as it pleases you to set me the example.”

“Oh, Keziah,” said Maud in a much milder tone, “Why can’t we go on properly?”

“Has the fault been mine, Maud?”

“No,” Maud frankly allowed. “It has been mine, and mine altogether. But we must be friends to-day, for the nurse and baby will arrive, and we can’t quarrel over the baby.”

The mention of this baby seemed to summon Kizzy’s better nature. She rushed to her friend in her old abrupt manner, flung her arms round her, and kissed her passionately. “Oh, Maud, I have been so wrong,” she cried. “Do forgive me. I knew it was aggravating not to show you the letter, and yet I did it. Maud, I’m not a bit nice, how can

you endure me ? The letter was from my cousin, Thomas Hackbit. He proposed to me, and I have written and refused him."

"That's right, my own Kizzy," said Maud affectionately : "and I will own myself in the wrong more than you, ever so much more. I kept back the news of your lover's acquittal this morning. It was in the paper."

Keziah's face looked terribly mournful in a moment. "Oh, Maud," she said, "that can make no difference. He can never be anything to me in this world. Don't say anything to me, because you cannot understand. Some day, perhaps, I will tell you ; I cannot now."





CHAPTER XX.

A SACRIFICE.



REAT was the astonishment of Keziah the following evening, to hear her father announced. "What can it mean?" she said to Maud.

"Let him come in here, and I will go away," suggested Maud. So Mr. Rimmon was ushered into the drawing-room.

He looked a good deal agitated; and when the door was closed, spoke to his daughter in a voice that was very hollow and unnatural. There was something so strange in his manner, that Keziah stood transfixed, looking at him, and unable to speak.

"Have you no word of welcome for me, Kizzy?" said the banker uneasily.

“ Oh, what is the matter, father ? ” said Keziah, advancing, and taking one of his cold clammy hands, which hung by his side, limp.

“ Kizzy,” said her father, turning away his face from her gaze, “ I have come to ask you, my daughter, my own flesh and blood, to save me from ruin.”

The girl pressed her hands suddenly against her eyes, as if to steady herself. “ Tell me what you mean, father,” she said, with a desperate effort.

“ Oh, Kizzy,” he began, “ I have not been a good man. You know that, Kizzy. I am in the power of your cousin more than you can guess, more than words of mine could tell. He will expose me, Kizzy, he will ruin me, unless I can give him the one thing he covets, that is yourself, Kizzy.”

The girl started, flung her arms into the air with a cry of pain, then cast herself, face downwards, upon a couch that was near.

The sight would have moved even her father’s hard heart, had his own case been less desperate; but he had gone too far, he must now stop at nothing. He went on regardless of the pain he was inflicting.

“He got your letter in which you refused him; and he has threatened me with instant exposure unless you change your mind. He has no character to lose. Oh, Kizzy, save your father from destruction. He will be a kind husband to you. He will give up drinking altogether for your sake. And I promise you, Kizzy, that I will mend my ways. Kizzy, it is in your power to redeem your father’s soul from death. Can you say me nay?”

For a few minutes there was a dead silence. Then the girl’s lithe form rose erect before him. The flashing dark eyes looked into his. The face had almost a glory upon it. She said softly to herself, “By doing this can I expiate his sin.” She stretched out her hand to her father. He did not offer to touch it.

“Tell my cousin,” she said in a firm voice, “that I will marry him.” And then, as if she had borne all she could, she fled from the room.

Mr. Rimmon had nothing to do but take his leave. He groaned as the door closed behind him. This sacrifice of the one pure thing he possessed crowned his crimes.

Alone in her own room, Kizzy wept such tears as angels might weep to see. "Oh, Rupert, my own lost darling, this is for you. For you I shall break my heart. Surely God will let me expiate your sin by patient suffering, that in a brighter world we may yet be all in all to each other."

This idea of Keziah's, of sacrificing herself to appease God for her lover's crime, was in reality but an offshoot of the sentiment of redemption by substitution, so deeply implanted in the human heart, and lingering throughout larger areas than that of the Black Country. Who shall deny its nobility even when least intelligently applied ?

Rupert Edmonton, whom we shall henceforth call by his true name of James Elworthy, was no sooner a free man than he made his way to Jumley, to seek his darling, whom he imagined to be there. For he had heard incidentally, that she had not returned to the Berediths', though Mrs. Beredith had not communicated to him anything about Keziah. This made him the more anxious to see her immediately on his discharge.

He looked much older, and his nerves were shaken and unsteady. His heart beat so wildly as he rang the bell of Mr. Rimmon's house, that his head seemed to swim, and he could hardly see. He glanced at the dull windows, thinking, "Oh, if that lovely face should appear, with its crown of black ringlets, how bright it would all look." But perhaps his darling was ill, pining away for him. How many pangs he suffered before the door was opened by Mrs. Rimmon, who asked him into the dining-room, where sat her husband, extremely ill at ease, conning over some accounts.

He turned deadly pale, at the sight of Elworthy. With an almost supernatural effort he controlled his tongue enough to stammer out—

"This is not right in you, Dr. Elworthy, to come here, considering all things."

Elworthy leaned upon a chair for support with one hand, and looking keenly at Mr. Rimmon, with the grave eyes gazing out of hollow depths, the result of sleeplessness and suffering, "Have I not the best right to come here," he asked, "when I am engaged to your daughter, and with your own consent?"

“That was before I knew,” gasped out Mr. Rimmon. “But you cannot, Dr. Elworthy, think of holding my daughter to her promise, after you have been tried for murder.”

Elworthy winced, but he said with a quiet dignity, drawing himself up to his full height, “I can take my answer from none but your daughter.”

“Take this for an answer,” said Mr. Rimmon, growing very irate and very desperate. “Keziah has engaged herself to her cousin. They had always been sweet on each other, and this business has cured her of her fancy for you.”

“Good God!” cried Elworthy, not believing he could have heard aright. “Have the goodness to repeat what you said. Oh, woman, false, fickle woman!” he moaned. “For God’s sake, let me see her.”

“She is away in a situation she found for herself.”

“If you have any humanity in you, sir, tell me where.”

“I do not choose, sir,” replied Mr. Rimmon, “to have my daughter harassed by an unwelcome visit from you.”

“She knows I am innocent by now. If she had loved me, she must have known it always.” His late miseries had almost dazed him. He could get no more from the girl’s father. He went out with a cry from his heart, “Why was I ever set at liberty! But I will see her and hear the truth from her lips. I will find out where she is.”

Poor Elworthy, he did not know how many weary, weary weeks of fever and delirium were to follow that expedition.





CHAPTER XXI.

WEDDING PREPARATIONS.

THE Rev. Brougham Banner's visits to Miss Dorcas Rimmon had become more and more frequent. Things were clearly coming to a point; and Miss Dorcas was assiduously working at her wedding trousseau, some portions of which she took for the inspection of Mrs. Rimmon, Miss Timmins being deputed to carry the same.

Mrs. Rimmon ventured to ask when the wedding was to take place, to which inquiry Dorcas replied but vaguely.

"Brougham," she said, "is not certain when it will be convenient for him to make a tour. We must be married when he can be best spared. Of

course you understand, Ann, men of his high calling cannot go hither and thither when they will."

"I should think you will be married from here," suggested Mrs. Rimmon. "Don't you think Joshua ought to be told? And I suppose you would like to have Keziah for bridesmaid; but she will be married at Easter herself."

"Oh, indeed," cried Miss Dorcas. "So she's going to have Thomas. I call it disgusting, after that other affair of hers. But of course you think Keziah perfect. For my part I don't."

"Poor Kizzy's had trouble enough anyhow," replied Mrs. Rimmon; "and she's been a very good girl to me, thought I could have wished her to be a little less hasty with her father at times. Won't you stay and see Joshua to-day? He won't be long before he's in."

"No, I shall choose my own time for telling him," rejoined the spinster. "Time enough for that when Brougham and I have fixed the day. I shall be married in green silk, and I shall wear a tulle veil and a wreath of orange blossoms. Miss Timmins and Miss Burgess are helping to make my wedding

dress now, and it looks most beautiful. When I am married, of course I shall do no more dressmaking. Other duties will come upon me as a clergyman's wife."

"Excuse me, my dear," said Mrs. Rimmon, "but have you seen any of Mr. Banner's relations? I suppose his parents are still living."

This was an awkward question, which Miss Dorcas was quite unable to answer; but she got out of it in her own slippery way.

"I will tell you all about it another time," she said, rising to take her departure, and calling Miss Timmins from the kitchen, where she had been temporarily deposited.

Miss Dorcas heard her apprentice laughing as she went towards the kitchen, and when they were in the street she began to rate her soundly for her improper conduct. "It makes me quite ashamed of you," said Miss Rimmon. "If you go on like that, you'll never get on in business."

Miss Timmins heard all this in silence. Her mind appeared to be somewhere else. She scarcely paid the most ordinary attention.

“Miss Timmins!” cried her admonitress, “I suppose you hear that I am speaking to you; and how fast you are walking!”

Miss Timmins altered her pace.

“I have something I wish to ask you,” said Miss Dorcas, with considerable dignity, “and that is, that you will keep my approaching marriage a strict secret.”

Miss Timmins gave a slight laugh, which was choked at its birth.

They had not proceeded farther than the Old Park, when Miss Timmins asked whether, as they were not very busy, she might be excused for an hour or so on the following morning.

“I suppose you don’t mind telling me where you want to go to,” said Miss Dorcas.

“I wish to meet a friend.”

“I hope that you have proper judgment in the choice of friends, and that they are respectable.”

“Quite respectable.”

“And how long do you wish to be away?”

“An hour or two would be enough.”

“Well, you may go. But let me beg of you

once more not to let anyone know of my approaching marriage."

The next morning Miss Timmins took advantage of the leave of absence accorded to her. Everything looked fresh and springlike that morning; but nothing could look more springlike and cheerful than did Miss Timmins with her ripe cheeks and dainty little white straw bonnet as she sallied forth.

But things did not go cheerfully in Miss Dorcas's millinery establishment that morning. For some reason or other she seemed very much out of temper. Miss Burgess, too, made such dreadful mistakes in her work that Miss Dorcas felt quite inclined to cry with vexation. But Miss Burgess's mistakes were not at the bottom of her ill-humour. The reason of that lay deeper. She was more aggravated than she would have chosen to tell, that Miss Timmins had asked leave to go out, and had not said where she was going. Miss Dorcas was sure of one thing, that Miss Timmins had nothing particular to tell, but had chosen to be aggravating. If this were the case, she had evidently succeeded well.

At half-past one o'clock who should drop in but

Mr. Hackbit—an event so unwonted that it set Miss Dorcas's heart palpitating. He saw her embarrassment, and laughed.

“Well, aunt,” said her nephew, with his hat on one side, and not removing it; “how do you do?”

“I'm pretty well, thank you, Thomas, except for a little rheumatism in my right knee.”

“Ah,” said Mr. Hackbit, “that's to be expected at your time of life, you know.”

“I was not aware that young persons usually suffered from rheumatism.”

“Have you been growing backwards, then?”

“I don't know what you mean, I am sure, Thomas,” replied Miss Dorcas, very red in the face; “but if you came here to insult me, you might have spared yourself the trouble.”

“I didn't come to insult you; I came to consult you.”

“To consult me; oh, yes.”

“But as you don't seem to want me, I'll go back again, I think; but before I go, it might interest you to know that Uncle Joshua asked me to call round to tell you something.”

As Hackbit had foreseen, his aunt's curiosity was too strong for her.

"As you are here, Thomas, you may as well tell me what it was you had come to tell me."

"Well, I don't care about the message I've brought, for I don't like the idea of people marrying at your time of life. And my message has to do with that."

Miss Dorcas bit her lip, deeply mortified, but still too curious to offend her nephew into going away without telling her.

"Well, Uncle Joshua thinks that you ought to have told him about this affair before. Aunt Rimmon told him. He asked me to look in and just say that the thing must be done properly, and that if you'll come up sometime this evening, arrangements can be made. Uncle is going to call upon Mr. Banner to talk to him about it; and I expect he'll hear his opinion pretty freely about not having asked his leave."

"Your uncle has no right at all to interfere," broke in Miss Dorcas hotly. "It has nothing to do with him. I am old enough to act for myself."

“The deuce, you are,” interjected Hackbit.

“If he goes up and sees Mr. Banner, I’ll never speak to him again, never.”

“But I expect he’s gone. He said he should go in the dinner hour.”

“Aunt Rimmon shall have the length of my tongue for telling him.”

“You’d better let Aunt Rimmon alone, or you’ll have me to talk to,” said her nephew, with a show of anger. “Uncle Joshua leads her a life enough, I should think. To tell you the truth, I’m heartily glad somebody has been fool enough to want to marry you—that is, if he’ll take you straight out of Jumley; and I pray heaven he will. I’d offer him fifty pounds out of my own pocket to do it. But if he runs away from you, don’t you come back here.”

“The Reverend Brougham Banner is not like you,” retorted Miss Dorcas with warmth. “I am not surprised you don’t understand him, a person of your drunken habits.”

“Look here, Aunt Dorcas,” said Mr. Hackbit, very impressively; “have the kindness to hold your

tongue about my drunken habits. When did you see me drunk last ? ”

“ That’s of no consequence at all—none whatever.”

“ Oh, isn’t it ? Well, I think it is. It’s a long time since I’ve been drunk, and when next you see me so, tell me of it ; I give you leave.”

“ It won’t be long first, I daresay,” said his aunt. “ I shall tell Keziah something about you when she comes home.”

“ You are welcome to say all you like. Your word has overpowering weight with it, I know.”

“ Well, if ever she marries you, she’ll repent it.”

“ A moment ago, aunt, you were complaining of my uncle’s interference in your case. I should like to remind you that you have nothing to do with Keziah and me.”

They were in the midst of this family jar, when the Rev. Brougham Banner entered the shop with Miss Timmins on his arm, radiant and blushing.

Miss Dorcas stared at the vision in a kind of blank apathy, with strained eyes that refused even to blink.

“ Good morning, Miss Rimmon,” said the clergyman.

“ Good morning,” answered Miss Dorcas faintly, and like an echo.

“ I have come to you to be congratulated,” went on the clergyman. “ You have always shown such a warm interest in me, that I am sure you will give me your hearty congratulations on my great happiness, for great it is.”

Mr. Hackbit looked as blank as his aunt, and extremely puzzled.

“ You’ve no need to wait, Miss Timmins,” said Miss Dorcas. “ You can go inside ; you’re after the time you said, though.”

It was quite evident Miss Dorcas had not seen the whole truth yet, and was merely angry at perceiving that her apprentice had been in such close relations with the curate.

“ Excuse me,” said Mr. Banner, taking the apprentice by the hand. “ Let me explain the situation. This lady is my wife, and as such will not enter your workshop again. I am willing to make any compensation in my power.”

The muscles of Hackbit's face relaxed, and he burst into a violent fit of laughter. Peal after peal broke from him, and he held his sides. He could only utter such exclamations as "O Lord, it's too good! It's too good! O Lord, it's too good!"

He was recalled to himself by hearing the sound of a heavy fall. It was caused by his aunt, who had fainted and disappeared behind the counter.

The clergyman was the first to spring to her help, and he found her no slight burden to raise. The late Miss Timmins ran into an inner room and got some water. While this was happening, Hackbit's eyes opened wider than ever, as he beheld his uncle at the shop-door, taking in the whole scene.

"What is this, Thomas?" said that gentleman in a sepulchral tone.

"Oh, I can't tell you," said Hackbit, trying hard not to laugh again.

"Then perhaps you can, sir," said Mr. Rimmon, addressing the discomfited curate, who was holding his burden as far from the floor as his strength would permit.

"Indeed, sir, I cannot," he answered. "I am

quite taken by surprise myself ; I don't know what is the matter."

"Do you forget that you are talking to that lady's brother," asked Mr. Rimmon, with even more energy, "you hard-hearted Lovelace?"

The clergyman's cheeks crimsoned. He had been recently reading *Clarissa*, and the character of Lovelace in all its hideousness was fresh in his mind.

"I insist on your explaining yourself, Mr. Rimmon. Your insinuation is most unpleasant and most unjust."

"I never met with such cool impudence," said Mr. Rimmon. "I've just been calling on you, at your lodgings, and was told that you were out with that apprentice of my sister's."

"I would advise you to be careful how you speak of that lady," said the curate.

"Do you take upon yourself to defend her character, then?" said Mr. Rimmon.

"I should like to see the person who could dare to say anything against her character," retorted the curate, stoutly.

At this juncture, Miss Dorcas's eyes opened, and

beheld her reverend supporter. "Oh, Brougham," she said tenderly, "you have opened your heart to me at last. Kiss me, Brougham."

"Really," said the clergyman, "this is too much, it is really. Please somebody take this woman. It's insupportable, disgusting, indecent; it is really. I don't understand it at all."

At the tone of his voice, rather than the words he uttered, Miss Dorcas fainted again, and was assisted to a chair. The curate, hot and indignant, confronted Mr. Rimmon.

"I shall insist on an explanation, sir," he said.

"You insist on an explanation!" retorted Mr. Rimmon. "You who have won my sister's young affections, only to cast them from you and trample them under foot."

"I—won—her—affections," said the clergyman, with a stop between every word. "Are you mad? Or am I mad?"

"I'm not mad," said Mr. Rimmon; "and you are not. The worse for you. A preacher of the Gospel, acting the part of a common thief, and traitor, and liar."

Mr. Hackbit at this moment interrupted.

“ Don’t you think it’s better, uncle, to enter into a few explanations before using such epithets. They’re nasty in point of law, you know ; ticklish. There may be some mistake.”

“ Mistake ! ” almost shrieked the curate. “ Has she dared to make the mistake, that I—loved her ! Has she—oh, really it is too disgusting.”

“ Would you mind explaining ? ” said Mr. Rimmon, considerably quieted down by Hackbit’s interference.

“ There is nothing to explain, that I am aware of,” said Mr. Banner. “ This lady,” indicating Miss Timmins, “ and I have been for some time engaged to each other ; but I did not make the engagement public ; for the people in this neighbourhood have a low way of talking of such matters which I strongly object to. This morning we were married, and I brought my wife to receive Miss Rimmon’s congratulations, and to make any reparation I could for having removed her before her time was really up. I decided to marry at once, because I received a better appointment at Langton, as curate to Mr.

Rockingham. He is going away for some time almost immediately, and wishes me to come to Langton as soon as possible, to take his place. Further than this I can tell you nothing."

Hackbit and Rimmon looked at each other in blank amazement. At last Mr. Rimmon said, with evident effort, "I beg your pardon, sir. I see there has been some mistake."

"I think, uncle, you are taking the wisest course," said Hackbit.

"I am sure," said the clergyman, breaking in once more, "I never dreamed she thought my attentions were for her, as she seems to have done. I thought—excuse me if I say it, I mean no offence—that she took a very motherly interest in me. I cannot tell you how surprised and shocked I am."

"May I beg of you," said Mr. Rimmon, huskily, "to say nothing about this?"

Hackbit shrugged his shoulders, thinking doubtless that Miss Dorcas herself had spread the thing about enough, in spite of her pretended secrecy.

"You see," said Mr. Rimmon, "I have a position

in this place, and I could not bear a story like this to get about."

"I am not likely to say anything about it," said the curate. "I can assure you it's most trying to me as a clergyman."

Dorcas at this point groaning, Mr. Banner looked round for his wife, and beckoned her to come away at once. He had no wish to encounter any more of Miss Dorcas's speeches to him; so with a curt good morning, he left the shop with his new wife; and Miss Dorcas at last came to herself.

"Where's Brougham—my dear, cruel Brougham?" she asked faintly.

"Look here," said Mr. Rimmon, glad of a new object for his wrath, which had not abated in the least. "How dare you make fools of us in this way? And at your age, too!"

"I must go about my business," said the nephew, and took his leave. His uncle sharply followed him out of the shop, determined to waste no more words upon the wretched woman who had put him to shame. His position seemed to be ebbing away. Keziah had run away, Jubal had refused to obey

him, and now here was his sister disgracing him. "I tell you the truth, Hackbit," he said to his nephew when he had overtaken him, "I never knew such a disgraceful thing in my life."

"Oh, I have," said Hackbit; "things a great deal more disgraceful. She's only playing the fool. That's more contemptible than it is disgraceful. It isn't like playing the villain." And the pair went their different roads.

In the meantime Miss Dorcas, by the help of Miss Burgess, had gained her own room, and lay, imploring her apprentice not to speak to her, though that young lady had not opened her mouth, and showed no disposition to speak to her.

Miss Burgess, who had heard most of what had occurred, and from being amused, had grown rather alarmed at the turn things had taken, began to think with a good deal of apprehension of the year still to be passed before her apprenticeship would come to an end. She foresaw, for that one moment of triumph, which she had truly enjoyed for her friend's sake, a weary payment of jarring, unkind

words, plentiful discouragement, suspicion, and overwork. She knew that her friend would write to her, and that she was to visit her at Langton later on. But even this visit was beset with difficulties; and she could not help feeling that the cage door had in very truth been opened, and one bird had been freed and one had been left.

Martha Timmins and Emily Burgess had been fast friends from the hour in which Emily had come to Jumley, a disheartened and almost broken-hearted girl in deep mourning, to learn dressmaking. Kind friends had paid the necessary premium for this when she was left without a single relative. Martha had been drawn to the stranger, for she, too, was in a sense alone in the world, having only an aunt, who considered she had done great things when she apprenticed her, and on her rare visits did little but remind her of the fact. Emily had lost much strength before coming, and could sew but very slowly at first; and many a time Miss Timmins had finished her task after her own. Thus it was no wonder that Emily Burgess felt rather miserable when she saw her friend borne away from her. She was very

thankful when Miss Dorcas expressed a wish to be left alone.

Dorcas Rimmon passed the next few days in indulging her mingled mortification and anger, and in self-justification. None are so deluded as the self-deluded.





CHAPTER XXII.

TOM TOWERS'S TEMPTATION.



SOME weeks had passed since the events just narrated, and a furious March wind was blowing. It was evening, and the same company of old chums that we met on a former occasion were congregated round the fire at the Bull's Head in Langton. But this time a silent mood was not upon them, for Jody had had striking news to impart. He had been walking, he said, by his "garding," the grave already referred to, not because it was haunted by sweet memories of the dead and gone, as some who did not know him might imagine, but because he liked to smoke his pipe in the open air, and his cottage door opened on the graveyard.

“It wor only last night,” said Jody, “an’ the wind wor blowin’ fit to cut you through. It wor between eleven an’ twelve, an’ the clouds wor blowin’ over the moon till sometimes it wor pitch dark an’ sometimes quite light ; an’ I just walked round my garding, an’ I thought I heard somebody speak nigh to th’ church. So I just walked straight up to where I heard it.”

One of the cronies here nudged the man next to him. Jody looked fierce. “Do you mean you don’t think as I did go up to it ?” said he in a loud, shrill tone.

Everybody declared that no one meant anything of the kind, and that they knew he would of course go straight up to it. Jody went on—“I couldn’t see nothink,” (which was probably the case, seeing that Jody had, with the rapidity of lightning, secreted himself behind a tombstone on hearing the voice). “Well, the voice it came nearer, an’ I knew it quite well. It wor Dr. Towers an’ his nephew, an’ what words they let fall I will never breathe to anyone.” This was very likely, considering he did not hear anything that he could understand. His com-

panions, however, firmly believed that Jody was in possession of the secret of this strange family; and they looked upon him with a greatly-increased respect.

While Dr. Towers and his nephew were being thus talked of, they themselves were holding a conversation of no ordinary import. The country lane where they were walking was bounded by high hedges. The lane itself was so narrow that they were obliged to walk very near together. Both appeared strangely agitated.

“I see nothing before us but ruin,” said the elder man, in a tragical tone of voice, “now Pelbois has made such demands upon us, and that wretched Hermann has threatened us. Two hundred pounds! Where are we to find two hundred pounds who have not two hundred pence?”

“Uncle,” replied the younger man, appealingly, “wont you let me make a clean breast of it to you?”

He was instantly silenced. “On no account,” said his uncle. “When first you told me that you were in that man’s power, do you remember how I begged you never to tell me why?”

"I do," replied Tom, with an effort.

"And I said I would satisfy the demands so long as you told me nothing. Don't break your word to me."

"Uncle," said the younger man, with a firm voice but ghastly countenance, "I will end this difficulty."

"For God's sake, do nothing rash, nothing wrong."

"What can wrong-doing matter, seeing you believe in no future, uncle?"

"Yet, I pray you, do not do wrong. There is a wrong and right."

"There are those that can sink no deeper," said Tom.

"I don't believe that," replied his uncle.

"You are a strange mixture of belief and unbelief."

"I am," said the doctor; and he laid his hand affectionately on his nephew's shoulder. "But there is that within me that assures me it is better for you, it is better for me, to endure martyrdom than to sink into more wrong-doing. It may be that I am on the

verge of a greater belief ; I know not. But I pray God to show me light ; and I am sure that though our life ends with our last breath, to live well during this short span is worth having been born, however bitter may have been the schooling."

But Tom was deaf to all this now ; and he had mentally resolved on a course of action. His uncle should not know of it till it should be past remedy. He must ask Maud Harwyn to marry him ; he saw no other course.

Then came the difficulty—how was he to word his letter to her?—of course it must be done by letter. He could not go to Manchester to see her, living alone as she did. But how could he commit this terrible wrong against her whom he had loved so passionately and renounced at the cost of such bitter struggles ? He knew in his heart of hearts that Maud believed her money was the only thing that separated them. How bitter it was that this should become his reason for asking her ! It was as though an evil genius pursued him. The thing he most coveted was to be his, and turn to Dead Sea fruit ; nay, worse, would not this loved being rise up in

judgment against him? At this moment it appeared clear to his mind that a day of disclosures must come, in this world or in another. He shut his ears to the cries of his heart. Like Faust, he had summoned the Evil One, and he was not a master who would let him break his compact. He should win his Marguerite, and afterwards would come the flames. The angels, of course, would see to her safety; no real harm would come to her pure spirit. His uncle and aunts would be freed from the pressure and anxieties they now felt on his account. He must bear the penalty alone. So Faust went home and wrote to Marguerite, and Mephistopheles was at his elbow.





CHAPTER XXIII.

A FATEFUL DECISION.



WHEN Tom Towers's letter came to The Hollies, the girls were at breakfast. Having read it, Maud began to laugh.

"What are you laughing at?" asked Keziah.

"It's the drollest letter, Kizzy. It's from Tom; a proposal of marriage. As far as I can judge, he seems to have made violent efforts to say he does not care for my money, yet he has not said it. I suppose he thinks I shouldn't believe him if he did. It's so ridiculous to have money. I must say this proposal is couched in about the coolest words he ever addressed to me. I don't call it a bit affectionate.

I assure you, Kizzy, that had this man not spoken to me many times in a way I could not mistake, I should take him to be a mere fortune-hunter by the letter. I shall tell him so when I write. He has often made me miserable by his eccentric ways. I will pay him back in his own coin, and reward him afterwards. I shall tell him I say ‘No, sir,’ to all fortune-hunters.”

“But supposing he took you at your word, Maud?”

“He won’t. But I think I shall insist on his getting his qualification before I marry him.”

Maud, in her triumph, did write the letter she had intended; and it was a masterpiece of coldness and delicate satire, extremely unsatisfactory to the recipient, though it really contained no refusal.

The effect Maud’s letter had upon Tom Towers was of the bitterest description. Shots in the dark sometimes go straight home, as if fate would laughingly demonstrate to the marksmen of this world how much better his shots are aimed than theirs. No one knowing all about Towers could possibly have wounded him more deeply.

He was just walking out to see a patient when he received the letter. He opened it in the road, with a palpitating heart. Not feeling courage to face the full revelation of Maud's mind upon the subject of his offer, if this letter should contain such a revelation, he allowed his eyes to rest upon but one line at a time, covering the rest with the envelope which had contained the letter. Having come to the last word, he was conscious of standing still in the road, feeling a total inability to move. It was clear to him that Maud had fathomed the baseness of his design upon her, and had retaliated as might have been expected. If only he had followed his impulse to speak to her at Christmas, nay even before, he could then have said truly, "It is you I want, not your money." Could he add that lie to the rest, now all was reversed, and it was her money he wanted, and not her? For it was the fact that, now he had a design upon the young lady's property, his former ardent wish to possess the girl herself grew cold, shrank, paled, and seemed ready to die outright.

Though he alone was to blame, it seemed to him

as if she, like one of fate's accomplices, beckoned him on to destruction by means of the gold she displayed unpityingly to his wretched poverty.

How long Tom would have stood thinking is a question; but he was at length called out of his apathy by the cheery voice of Mr. Saltring, who clapped him upon the shoulder with a ringing "good morning."

"Were you coming up to see Laura?" he asked.

Tom was obliged to think for a moment before he could reply. The thought seemed to come to him from a long distance, and he said, "Why, yes, I was going to call there first. I hope she has been able to sleep?"

"She has slept a little," said Mr. Saltring. "Of course I sat up with her. I am the established nurse, you know."

"Has she told you yet how she burnt herself?" asked Towers, who was now back in the present.

"She won't tell. I hope your uncle wasn't annoyed by the ill-natured things she said to him last night? We could scarcely get her to have her arm dressed at all, and yet it isn't a large burn."

"She doesn't appear to me to lack courage," remarked Tom.

"Laura?" said Mr. Saltring. "No, she doesn't lack courage; and she doesn't lack a temper, and it was the latter that was active last night I suspect. But you must be in a hurry, and I am keeping you." So the two parted.

When Towers arrived at Mr. Saltring's house, he was asked into the sitting-room which Keziah had occupied, where he found Miss Laura with all her bristles up, and Mrs. Saltring vainly trying to induce her to have some breakfast. At sight of young Towers, Laura said, "Why did you inconvenience yourself to come so early, Mr. Towers? There was no necessity."

Mrs. Saltring looked deprecatingly at her daughter, and asked the young doctor to take a seat.

"Have you had much pain, Miss Saltring?" he asked.

"Never mind about my pain," replied Laura; and she began to tear the bandage off, as if she scorned the idea of having pain.

Towers tried to stop her, and in the movement,

Maud's letter, which he had all the while been carrying, fell on the floor unnoticed. With much tact, he induced the intractable girl to let him bandage her arm up.

"Will there be a scar?" asked Laura.

"Very likely, if you tear the bandages off, as you were about to do," answered Towers.

She turned her head impatiently away, and Tom took his leave. He was in a dream, scarcely knowing what he did, and only vaguely conscious that his feet were moving upon the ground. He visited patient after patient, mechanically; and at last when he went home, exhausted, he found his uncle in the surgery, at home first.

"Uncle," he said, with a groan, "I have heard from Miss Harwyn."

"Well?"

"She has found me out."

"Found you out?" echoed the doctor in a tone of real alarm. "For God's sake explain yourself."

"Here's the letter," said Tom, fumbling in his pocket, but in vain. Then with a new look of fear on his face, he turned out all the contents of his

pockets, one by one, and having done so, looked blankly at his uncle.

“Have you lost it? Oh, Tom!”

The nephew slightly raised his shoulders in a helpless way, and faintly shook his head, with a look of misery in his face that Maud would never have forgotten if she could have seen it.

“Think, think, where can you have lost that letter?”

The only answer was a desolate shake of the head.

“Then tell me, do tell me, what the letter contained.”

The contents of the letter were all Tom appeared able to remember. The words were burnt into his brain; and he recited the letter almost word for word. “You know I always loved her, uncle, and it did seem to me a way out of our difficulties, but now I fear our last chance has gone.”

After a little time, the elder man went out, forgetting his dinner; and when he came home again, at half-past five, Tom was just where he had left him, but not the same. As soon as he saw his uncle,

he laughed at him, and began to gabble German. The doctor, with a cry in his heart, but none on his tongue, went towards him; but his nephew sprang upon him like a madman, and, still speaking German, called him Fate, and said he would have a hand-to-hand fight with him. It required the doctor's utmost strength to overcome this madman.

"Amy," he said, when his sister came in, "he is very ill; he must be got to bed. I don't want this to be talked about; but we can't get him to bed ourselves. Go yourself, and ask Mr. Saltring to come in."

Mr. Saltring, when he arrived, quiet and self-possessed, as if such a sight as this were quite a usual thing with him, asked no questions, but, with an infinite tenderness of manner, rendered any help he could; and Tom was got to bed.

In the meantime Miss Laura Saltring had discovered the letter on the floor, and possessed herself of its contents. She understood the situation at once, or thought she did, and heartily despised young Towers. She decided that she would give the letter back into his own hand with a stinging

comment on his carelessness. She could not, however, refrain from remarking to her father, when he came home and told her that young Towers was very ill, "I know why he is ill. He must be a very bad young man."

"Laura," said her father, almost pathetically, "I wish I could see more gentleness and kindheartedness in you. Where can you have learnt to be so unfeeling?"

"You are always reproving me, nearly, father, for something."

"When have I ever spoken harshly to you in my whole life?" said Mr. Saltring with deep emphasis. "If I were the only sufferer from your faults, I believe I could go on bearing them."

"You must have come right upstairs to lecture me."

"No, no, I came to read to you."

"I don't want to be read to to-night;" and so saying, Laura turned her face to the wall. And her father, patient and loving as he always was, took up a book and did read, till his daughter fell asleep.

The morning after this, Laura appeared in very

good spirits, and asked for her writing-desk. She had thought of something that would make her important. She would write to Miss Harwyn and tell her how ill young Towers was, cleverly omitting any comment or allusion to the letter she had found. And she, child though she was, did so write her letter that Maud the acute believed that this was a mere innocent piece of information, and that Laura had written to say her arm was burnt.

Laura had the great satisfaction of hearing that, on the evening after Maud must have received her letter, she had come to the Laytons'. But she did not hear, what would have given her more satisfaction still, that Maud had had an interview with Dr. Towers, and had been taken to see his nephew, who was conscious and in his right mind, though greatly exhausted.

The meeting between these two had been of a most trying description. Maud, full of self-reproaches, protested that her letter had only been a freak; and young Towers faintly and even more faintly refused the hand she now offered to him. But for his uncle he would have made a clean breast

of it; for he felt that would have been the more honest course, if less wise in a worldly sense.

On the following day Laura heard, on good authority, that young Towers was engaged to Miss Harwyn, and that they were to marry as soon as Tom should be well enough, and go to Paris to get him strong again.





CHAPTER XXIV.

ENDINGS AND BEGINNINGS.



ASTER had nearly come; and The Hollies was a scene of much activity and some little confusion. Maud was having her packing done for some months' stay abroad. Kizzy was making modest preparations for her wedding—which was like making her shroud, she said.

When the wedding-dresses came home, the girls put them on, and, covered with cloaks, went into The Chestnuts to show them to the grandmother.

“Ah, Kizzy,” said the old lady, at sight of her attired in a white silk with lace flowers, “wilful waste makes woful want. David burnt my old dress this morning on the kitchen fire, and the key

was in it ; and I had to search on my knees for it in the ashes."

"You should have asked one of the servants to do that," said Keziah.

"Very likely," replied the grandmother, "and let them know I had something to lock up? I sent them outside while I looked; and I heard them laughing. That's what you come to when you are old, and all them dead and gone as cared for you."

"How can you say that, grandmother, when Uncle David is so kind to you?"

"Ah, he'll come to the workhouse himself, the way he wastes things. Better by half have saved your money," Mrs. Rimmon went on, looking at the dress. "I was married in a cotton dress as I could work in; had none of your gee-gaws and follow-me-ups."

"Look at Maud's dress," said Kizzy, half inclined to laugh.

She turned her eyes, and gazed fascinated at this miracle of the dressmaking art. It was of rich white brocaded satin.

“No use to do work in,” observed Mrs. Rimmon after a minute or two.

“But Maud won’t have to work,” answered Keziah.

“She may come to it,” said the grandmother, who, if she prophesied, always prophesied evil.

“Well, if I do,” replied Maud, “I’ll buy a dress to work in.”

“It’s always buy, buy, and never save, save. But there’s David coming.”

He heard what was going on, and he went into his dark drawing-room and closed the door. He took out of his pocket two little packets, one of which he kissed repeatedly. “My poor dead love, my poor dead love,” he moaned. He must go and see Maud in her wedding-dress, which was his dead love’s shroud. He composed himself, however, and went into the parlour.

Both girls looked superb. David saw but one of them. It was his dead love in her shroud. In a blundering, blind kind of way, he pushed the little box into Maud’s hand, gave the other to Keziah, cast one long, anguished look at Maud, and

fled from the room ; and in this act revealed his secret.

“ Oh, how could you have done it, Maud ? ” said Keziah, her colour coming and going rapidly.

“ I don’t understand,” said Maud in a broken voice ; and she looked with tears in her eyes at her friend, and then the tears fell upon the rich dress.

“ Oh, let us go and take them off, they are so unlucky,” said Keziah ; and without another word of adieu they left.

Silently they removed the finery. Then Maud threw herself upon her friend’s neck, saying, “ Do me justice, Kizzy ; we are just going to part. Indeed, indeed, I did not know he was caring for me.”

“ I do believe you,” replied Keziah affectionately ; “ but, O Maud, poor uncle David ! ” They cried a little together, and then opened their packets. They were both alike, small gold brooches, set with emeralds and pearls.

This was their last night together. The next day Keziah was to go to Jumley, and Maud to Bristol. The nurse and the baby were to remain

at The Hollies till Keziah's new home should be ready to receive them.

Mr. Hackbit had been making extensive preparations, at Mr. Rimmon's expense ; and it was no mean house he had taken and furnished, though it was in Jumley, and near Mr. Rimmon's own.

"Why, Thomas," Mr. Rimmon had said to his nephew, "why should you live in a house three times as good as mine?"

"Because you know I am worth that expenditure to you."

"Oh, to be out of your power!" said Mr. Rimmon desperately.

Mr. Hackbit had not drunk a single glass of spirits since his engagement to Keziah. Mr. Saltring knew of the fact, and congratulated him. "There is nothing for it but not touching a drop," he said, "for men who have ever given way to it."

This was two days before Keziah's wedding, and Miss Dorcas, in the act of damaging the reputation of the dressmaker who had made Keziah's wedding dress, made her comments all the more loudly, seeing Mr. Saltring walk in.

“How do you do, Miss Rimmon?” he said, holding out his hand frankly, with a friendly smile on his jovial face.

“No, thank you, sir, I shall not shake hands,” said Miss Dorcas, “after the way you’ve treated me.”

“I’m sure I’m very sorry if I’ve offended you,” replied the wine merchant; but the milliner would not hear him, and went out of the room.

Then Mr. Saltring displayed before Keziah’s eyes a silver tea and coffee service, which he gave with many kind expressions and sincere hopes for her happiness. “I almost look upon you as my own child,” he said affectionately. “We missed you sadly after you left us. They say, handsome is that handsome does; perhaps that’s why you are so beautiful.”

While this was happening, Maud, at her brother’s at Bristol, was wearied out with preparations. Mr. Towers was to come the next day and sleep at the vicarage. Neither his uncle nor his aunts were coming to the wedding; but the Laytons were, and, of course, Gerald. Laura Saltring was to be a bridesmaid; “for,” as Maud observed to her sister-in-law, “she is such a dear innocent little girl, and

was the unconscious means of bringing about our match."

The dear innocent little thing was pre-eminently occupied in planning ways and means of fascinating the male part of the guests.

The two weddings came off on the same day. Nothing noteworthy happened at either, except perhaps that Mrs. Rimmon wore a new dress of brown silk—a truly extraordinary event.

END OF VOL. I.



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